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Tribute to the Fallen: The Evolution of Canadian Battlefield Burials during the First World War

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in History

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Abstract

This dissertation focuses on the burial of Canadian soldiers during the First World War. This study explores the ways in which the body was treated upon death during the early, middle, and late years of the conflict to show the drastically different practices and customs that were implemented and modernized throughout the war. While nineteenth century military burial customs were suitable for religious beliefs at the time, a religious shift among the general populace occurred at the end of the century. Subsequent conflicts showcased the inadequacies of established military practices.

While the Boer War demonstrated soldiers' need to ensure a proper burial, the First World War acted as the catalyst for change in how the military approached burials. Coupled with significant advancements in military equipment and tactics, military authorities were not prepared to deal with the religious need for burial and the number of burials necessary after conflicts. As a result, military and political authorities feared demoralized troops and potential political crises with news of burial inadequacies reaching the home front, which led to a more formalized approach to burials. Whereas military officials explored battlefield policies and practices, political authorities explored ways to maintain the graves of fallen soldiers. This dissertation traces the evolution of military and political thought in this regard.

Key Words

British Red Cross Society, Burial, Cemetery, Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Death, Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries, Fabian Ware, First World War, Graves Registration Commission, Imperial War Graves Commission

Acknowledgements

There are several people who helped me throughout this entire process and are deserving of thanks. First and foremost, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Dr. Jonathan Vance, for his expertise, guidance, and faith in my abilities while I completed this work. I learned a great deal from working with Dr. Vance. I would also like to thank my second reader, Dr. Allyson May, for her constructive input and edits. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the staff at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, the Library and Archives Canada, and the British National Archives for their assistance in researching this dissertation.

I would also like to extend many thanks to my university friends. Specifically, I would like to thank Aaron Boyes and Madeleine Kloske for their inspiration, critiquing, and suggestions. Their support and advice helped me immensely throughout the writing process. I would also like to thank Aaron Boyes for his words of wisdom and encouragement in addition to his editorial help. Further thanks go to Patrick Fournier, Sean Graham, and Andrew Gaiero for their continued friendship, humour, and social outings to help clear my mind.

I would also like to thank my family for their support and encouragement throughout this process. It was a long road to finishing this immense work, but it was truly worth it in the end. Your support and encouragement helped me throughout the entire process of writing this dissertation. Finally, I would like to thank my loving wife, Susan Garrett. You were there in whatever capacity I needed – editor, critic, listener, and friend. You could not have been a better companion through this process.

List of Acronyms

AG	Adjutant-General
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
BRCS	British Red Cross Society
CASC	Canadian Army Service Corps
CEF	Canadian Expeditionary Force
CO	Conscientious Objectors
CWGC	Commonwealth War Graves Commission
CWGD	Canadian War Graves Detachment
DAAG	Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General
DAG	Deputy Adjutant-General
DGR&E	Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries
GHQ	General Headquarters
GRO	General Routine Order
GRC	Graves Registration Commission
GRU	Graves Registration Units
IWGC	Imperial War Graves Commission
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officers
OMFC	Overseas Military Force of Canada
OR	Other Ranks
PMG	Paymaster General's Branch
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RFC	Royal Flying Corps

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Introduction: Tribute to the Fallen

In May 2000, the Government of Canada, through Veterans Affairs Canada, worked with the Royal Canadian Legion and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) to repatriate the remains of an unknown soldier from the First World War. These remains were laid to rest at the National War Memorial in Ottawa to serve as a solemn reminder of war and sacrifice. The repatriation itself, however, was far removed from the rules dictating burials set out by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in 1917, known then as the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC). Despite being in contravention of the non-repatriation policy of the IWGC, the 2000 repatriation was permitted since it would serve as a memorial and be subject to strict rules. The rules included stipulations that Canada never ask the CWGC for another body to be exhumed and that no DNA or other technology ever be used to identify the remains of the exhumed soldier.

This soldier had been in a CWGC cemetery for nearly a century before being disturbed. While resting at the CWGC cemetery, the remains were cared for by the commission, a process that historians have studied in considerable depth. This particular repatriation is well known as it received national attention, and is a relatively contemporary event. Furthermore, national commemorative efforts are currently of intense interest and typically gain much media attention. However, unlike the unknown soldier, very little is known about how any soldiers' remains were dealt with before being moved to a Commission cemetery.

The burial of soldiers during the First World War, as seen through the case of the unknown soldier, is starkly different from the way in which military burials and commemoration were conducted throughout the decade prior to the First World War. Take, for example, the case of British soldiers in African conflicts including the various Zulu, Xhosa, and Ashanti conflicts throughout the mid-nineteenth century. These soldiers were irregular

soldiers recruited during campaigns to fight for the crown and were typically left where they fell to be forgotten. British irregulars had little to no connection back to Britain, while the unknown soldier was part of the modernization of armies into a citizen army. Furthermore, with a soldier in a citizen army, there were family and friends with connections to that soldier, thus there were people who desired some form of commemoration for their sacrifice. In contrast, there was no need to commemorate the sacrifice of irregulars during the eighteenth century, as they had no connections to the British people.

This dissertation will analyze the process by which a body was removed from the battlefield and given a proper burial. In order to analyse a ‘proper’ or Christian burial, it is important to note a difference in terminology. Throughout the First World War, the terms ‘proper burial’ and ‘Christian burial’ were used by soldiers when conducting or referencing previous burials. These two terms were used in a conflated sense to mean the same thing; however, this is far from true today. During the war, a proper burial was akin to providing a decent, respectful, or dignified burial. It was in this way that the two terms were conflated – respectful and dignified were interpreted as religious, and therefore, in Britain and Canada, with Christian rites. In the modern age, a proper burial can simply mean the action or practice of interring a body without having a connection to Christianity. Other religions can have a dignified burial, while following their own cultural burial practices, and non-religious burials can also be dignified. In comparison, a Christian burial is the burial of a deceased in consecrated ground following Christian rites.

The evolution of warfare led to a need to modernize the way in which military officials commemorated soldiers on the war front. Furthermore, it complicated the remembrance of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice by both the public and fellow soldiers. There were heated debates surrounding the rituals of remembrance for war dead, including debates on statues of war heroes, monuments to the fallen, and medals to those who served and gave their lives.

Though many studies look at commemoration and monuments, far fewer have explored the precursor to commemoration, the burial of the body and how that process has evolved over time.

Several studies have looked at varying aspects of graves and burials, but they have focused solely on British or American burials, leaving the Canadian approach to burial policy unexplored. This dissertation explores how the Canadian military conducted burials during its involvement in the First World War. However, the First World War cannot be the starting point of this study. Canada was born from the British Empire, which was engaged in major global conflicts throughout the nineteenth century, including the Crimean and Boer Wars. Thus, it is very likely that the knowledge, policies, and practices pertaining to burials in Canada originated in Britain. Even after Canada formally came into being in 1867, it was involved in three conflicts before the First World War. Therefore, to understand Canadian burial practices during the First World War, it is important to first analyse British and European burial practices, both military and civilian, throughout the nineteenth century.

Ross Wilson's work "The Burial of the Dead" looked at the British approach to burials and its effect on surviving soldiers. Moreover, it examined "the 'war culture' that developed within the British Army regarding death and burial on the Western Front [during the First World War]."¹ He explained that a distinct war culture emerged because of the need to bury dead comrades. Returning soldiers started to form associations in response to the need to bury fellow comrades; these associations sought to comprehend each man's spiritual place when it came to death, the dead, and burial practices from the war. Wilson

¹ Ross Wilson, "The Burial of the Dead: The British Army on the Western Front, 1914-18," *War and Society* Vol. 31, No. 1 (2012): 23.

went a step further by comparing death and burial on the Western Front to how burial was carried out in Britain before the war – a striking comparison.²

Perceptions among civilians about how to treat the body began to change during times of peace, particularly between the Crimean War and the Second Boer War. These sentiments had an impact during wartime, resulting in an overall change in perceptions of how to treat soldiers' bodies. As a result, civilian burials are also an important aspect to consider when exploring military burials. As Wilson showed, peacetime civilian burials significantly influenced wartime burials. For instance, Wilson noted that the physical presence of the corpse in death was important in pre-war civilian burials. Furthermore, the body of the deceased was washed and laid out in the home for loved ones to bereave and mourn.³

Indeed, the ways in which civilians viewed burial rituals and mourning underwent significant change in the nineteenth century. Historian Philippe Ariès called the nineteenth century the age of the beautiful death. It was during this period that people shifted away from focusing on the actual death of a person and began focusing on the suffering caused by the loss. Ariès noted that the Victorian culture of death moved away from the thought of divine judgement and more towards an expression of mourning.⁴ For example, upon the death of Prince Albert, Queen Victoria endured a long and public mourning period in which she avoided public appearances, remained secluded in her private residences, and wore black as a public symbol of mourning. Queen Victoria's well documented period of mourning was similar to other well-known British women, including Lucy Cavendish,

² Ibid., 26-27.

³ Ibid., 27.

⁴ Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, translated by Helen Weaver (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 409, 610-11.

Emma Haden, and Ann Rogers; however, as Patricia Jalland explains, there were few well-documented examples of such public grief and mourning in the lower class or regular citizen during the mid-nineteenth century.⁵ Furthermore, Jalland explains that during this period, religion still played a powerful part in the lives and deaths of upper and middle-class Victorians. In fact, Evangelicals revived the medieval ideal of the “good Christian death.”⁶ However, James Stevens Curl added that public displays of grief were required within Victorian society. These events helped showcase the wealth and power of a family and could occur within a funeral setting.⁷

Regarding burials, Julie Rugg noted rapid change in civilian practice. The church monopoly on burials was broken in the 1840s, which led to a rise in commercialized funerals. Rugg also notes that as a result of the broken monopoly, there was a gradual shift from churchyard to cemetery burials. This helped to eliminate the restrictions imposed by the church: companies were founded to deal with burial grievances and to bury the dead.⁸ Burials could take place in a cemetery with little to no restrictions on the burial itself. Comparatively, church burials were burdened with restriction. This is supported by Marilyn Yalom, who explained that the word “cemetery” was never used before the nineteenth century. Instead, “graveyard”, “churchyard”, “burial ground”, and “burying ground” were commonplace. “Cemetery” was derived from the Greek word

⁵ Patricia Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 321.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁷ James Stevens Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death* (Exeter: David & Charles, 1972), 7.

⁸ Julie Rugg, “The Origins and Progress of Cemetery Establishment in Britain,” in *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal*, ed. Peter C. Jupp and Glennys Howarth, (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1997), 105-112.

‘Koimeterium,’ which meant ‘a place to sleep’ and came about as a result of the rise in funerals.⁹

As historian Catharine Arnold explained in her book *Necropolis*, entrepreneurs in Victorian Britain created the new cemeteries. Arnold noted that while there were lobbying efforts to remove burials from populated places, entrepreneurs had already started investing in death and burial due to the lack of adequate burial spaces in London. Private enterprises were created to act as a collection of shareholders to bring about the creation of cemeteries. Essentially, as Arnold states, “cemeteries had become a form of property development” in Victorian England.¹⁰

While Rugg contended that it was the elimination of the church monopoly that initiated the revolution of burials, Glennys Howarth attributed the change to a realisation amongst Protestants that death rites for salvation were needed due to the absence of a belief in purgatory. Due to a shift in religious beliefs, there was a rise in the burial club movement, which sought to ensure that even the poor received a proper burial. Again, health risks and concerns also played an important role in the emergence of the burial club movement. Furthermore, undertakers profited from people’s fears of body snatchers by collecting large sums of money to ensure a body was buried.¹¹

⁹ Marilyn Yalom, *The American Resting Place: Four Hundred Years of History Through our Cemeteries and Burial Grounds* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008), xi-xii.

¹⁰ Catharine Arnold, *Necropolis: London and Its Dead* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 123-125.

¹¹ There are many studies that explore body snatching and the trade to ensure a body was buried. See: Hubert Cole, *Things for the Surgeon: A History of the Resurrection Men* (London: Heinemann, 1964), Brian Bailey, *The Resurrection Men: A history of the Trade in Corpses* (London: Macdonald, 1991), and Suzie Lennox, *Bodysnatchers: Digging up the Untold Stories of Britain’s Resurrection Men* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword History, 2016).

Glennys Howarth, “Professionalizing the Funeral Industry in England 1700-1960,” in *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal*, ed Peter C. Jupp and Glennys Howarth, (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1997), 121-123.

While attitudes towards where a body should be buried were changing in the nineteenth century, so too were attitudes on how to remember the deceased after their passing. Historian Julie-Marie Strange's work *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain* covers death and mourning toward the end of the nineteenth century. Strange notes the rise of the unusual trend of post-mortem photograph as a form of commemoration. A photographer would be commissioned to photograph a corpse, staged as if it were living, typically on a bed or a sofa with sheets and a pillow to suggest sleep. As Strange notes, there were many examples of the popularity of such photography.¹² Commemorative photographs are similar to the way in which families sought a tombstone as a way to commemorate a loved one's sacrifice during the First World War.

Strange's work also explored the dynamic of poverty, death, and burial in Victorian England. While some historians have suggested that the poor celebrated death far less than the upper class, Strange explored the subject in depth. She noted that in fact, the poor celebrated death more than the upper class, utilizing written and spoken words, along with complex symbols. Despite this, Victorian England still passed laws that showed a harshness towards those who could not pay for their own burials, such as the New Poor Law (1834), which began what Strange calls an "era" of pauper graves. These graves were essentially pits where a body, typically of a lower-class, was packed into a cheap coffin with little or no ceremony. While the New Poor Law was appalling, other laws like the Anatomy Act (1832) allowed unclaimed pauper dead to be donated to anatomy schools for

¹² Julie-Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 214.

dissection. Strange's work helps to demonstrate the low regard given to the British poor in burial.¹³

Gary Laderman's study *Rest in Peace* further explored the cultural history of death in America, looking at the relationship between civilians and their need for remembrance of deceased relatives. This relationship led to the rise of the funeral director in the twentieth century; and it was from these funeral directors that a unique American funeral tradition was constructed.¹⁴ Although Laderman did not deal with military burials directly, he did delve into the question of repatriating American bodies to the United States and how it impacted the funeral industry.¹⁵ David Marshall's article "Death Abolished" similarly explored changing attitudes toward civilian burials in nineteenth-century Canada. Marshall explained that religious beliefs did not monopolize the attitudes and rituals of death and burials. Instead, these rituals and attitudes were combined with different folk customs, which led to the emergence of a new culture of death.¹⁶

Brian Young's *Respectable Burial* gives an account of the civilian need to perform proper military burials and commemoration at Mount Royal Cemetery in Montreal. For instance, Mount Royal Cemetery authorities struggled in determining an appropriate relationship between national memory of the First World War and the commemoration of civilian burials.¹⁷ Young also examined how civilian cemeteries strove to organize commemoration for First World War veterans who died long after the war was over. This

¹³ Ibid., 7.

¹⁴ Gary Laderman, *Rest in Peace: A Cultural History of Death and the Funeral Home in Twentieth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 22-23.

¹⁵ Ibid., 47.

¹⁶ David Marshall, "'Death Abolished': Changing Attitudes to Death and the Afterlife in Nineteenth-Century Canadian Protestantism," in *Age of Transition: Readings in Canadian Social History, 1800-1900*, ed. Norman Knowles (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Canada, 1998): 372

¹⁷ Brian Young, *Respectable Burial: Montreal's Mount Royal Cemetery* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 145.

included Ormiston Roy's trips to Europe to visit military cemeteries so that he could advise civilian cemeteries of the best ways to honour veterans at home.¹⁸ After the war, civilian cemeteries fell more in line with Imperial War Graves Commission policies, or at the very least worked more closely with one another to honour the veterans who died following the war.

These works by Young, Laderman and Marshall help to show the established civilian norm for burials around the time of the First World War. Furthermore, they help to establish that civilian burials placed more emphasis on honouring a body than did military burials. Moreover, works that explore perspectives on death and the military in the late Victorian era help to establish the reasons why there was a substantial shift in the treatment of the body during the First World War.

While Young, Laderman and Marshall explored burial norms in Canada, other studies discussed the impact of death on soldiers during the war. For example, David Cannadine posits that there was a great deal more concern for a comrade's death than for one's own well-being during the First World War.¹⁹ Soldiers even routinely ventured into precarious situations just to ensure that all soldiers, including the unknown, were given a proper burial. While burying their comrades was inherently distressing to the psyche of soldiers, these same burials also provided a sense of closure knowing that their friend was given a final resting place that their family and friends could visit. In the modern era, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or 'shell shock' as it was known during the First World War, crippled soldiers. The experiences of these soldiers also helped to determine eventual military burial policy throughout the war.

¹⁸ Ormiston Roy was a superintendent to the Mount Royal Cemetery. *Ibid.*, 146.

¹⁹ David Cannadine, "War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain" in *Mirrors of Mortality: Social Studies in the History of Death*, ed. Joachim Whaley (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 207.

Cannadine also explored civilian and military burials throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with a special focus on Britain. Cannadine noted that during the nineteenth century, Western society was obsessed with death to the point that it was observed and talked about even more than sex, the previous obsession.²⁰ He later argued that inter-war Britain was even more obsessed with death due to a variety of factors, including the declining death rates since the Industrial Revolution, but mainly the conditions of the First World War.²¹ Out of this fascination grew the need to provide a proper burial in general.²² The need also resulted from growing concern among soldiers for a comrade's death over their own. The concern was largely a result of a soldier only being able to imagine his own death, whereas he could witness the death of a comrade. Furthermore, soldiers feared death not only because it ended their lives, but also because of the indignities that could follow, such as being left on the battlefield to rot. Burying a body satisfied a sense of duty by ensuring that a comrade did not suffer such an indignity.

Joanna Bourke furthered Cannadine's argument by detailing the trauma that was experienced by soldiers during the First World War. Bourke notes that the Roman Catholic Church was wholly unprepared for battlefield deaths and did not have battle rites for absolving sin before a battle. As such, it could not handle the level of death from the First World War. Furthermore, the trauma of death was greater in cases where a person was blown to pieces on barbed wire, or was missing and presumed dead since there was no closure to the death. Soldiers took more risks to ensure they brought back and buried the

²⁰ Ibid., 189.

²¹ Ibid., 196.

²² Ibid., 207.

bodies of their comrades, thus confirming that a comrade was killed in action and providing closure.²³

While other authors have explored the impact of death on the individual, Avner Ben-Amos examined the political aspects of death, introducing the idea of politicians using military deaths to their advantage. By 1870, France began to look at past war heroes in an attempt to foster nationalist fervor for the military, but with the underlying objective to prevent any possible military coup by ‘conservative officers.’ As such, military funerals and commemoration were introduced by French political officials as a way to perpetuate memory, but also to serve political purposes. Here, municipalities, patriotic associations, and churches took over commemorative efforts, which led to the death of a soldier being given a religious connotation in France. However, Ben-Amos later described commemorative efforts as being sporadic – the soldier would be remembered, but a defeat in battle or conflict was forgotten. During the First World War, questions of commemoration were again brought up in France.²⁴

Patricia Jalland introduced the notion that with no body and inadequate death practices, there was a great collective sorrow in society, which resulted in the need to invent national memorials to commemorate national sacrifices. The need to commemorate sacrifices was also compounded by the unwillingness of First World War survivors to talk about their experiences on the front and the horrors of war.²⁵ Jalland also posited that there was a disconnect between how death was viewed on the war front and on the home front.

²³ Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face to Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), Pg. 20-22.

²⁴ Avner Ben-Amos, *Funerals, Politics, and Memory in Modern France, 1789-1996* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 206-214.

²⁵ Pat Jalland, *Death in War and Peace: A History of Loss and Grief in England 1914-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 8-9.

While death was seen as terrible on the war front, death in war was viewed as glorious to those on the home front.²⁶

While changes in British and Canadian views on death are important, they only partially explain why there was such a contrast in burials and commemoration in the eighteenth century and nineteenth and twentieth centuries, respectively. The other vital change was the social makeup of the army. The nineteenth century saw a significant shift in attitudes towards the British army and army life. Whereas during the Napoleonic Wars, British General Arthur Wellesley, later the Duke of Wellington, referred to his soldiers as “the scum of the earth,” the late nineteenth century began to see the British soldier in a different light.²⁷ Historian Charles Carrington noted that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the British officer was of the aristocratic caste. Officers were linked with the court rather than politicians in England. Furthermore, the rank and file were recruits, typically unemployed. Carrington goes on to say that Wellington’s remark was true of soldiers even until the 1880s. However, by that time a reformation was taking place in the British army.²⁸

Historian Edward Spiers agreed with most of Carrington’s arguments. Spiers noted that the way in which the Wellington army sought recruits from amongst “the lowest portion of the population” was a source of controversy.²⁹ Furthermore, reliance on inexperienced officers exacerbated the issues. Promotion from the ranks was not done as many upper-class officers felt that a gentleman could not be bred into a ranker and thus, a

²⁶ Ibid., 17.

²⁷ Charles Carrington, *Soldiers from the Wars Returning* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1965), 19.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Edward M. Spiers, *The Army and Society, 1815-1914* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1980), 40.

ranker could never make an officer, nor would a ranker ever be able to acquire the necessary instincts to be an officer.³⁰

Regarding recruiting tactics, Deborah Avant explored the British use of ‘mercenary’ troops in European armies. Avant noted that the British resisted a move away from mercenaries up to the 1870s. She explains the reasons as relating to domestic forces and distaste for a standing army. Furthermore, the use of mercenaries went unnoticed by the average Briton allowing the British military to recruit mercenaries and protect British assets overseas without much protest. But Avant notes that by the time of the Crimean War and the Foreign Enlistment Bill, opposition to the recruitment of mercenaries emerged, particularly amongst Conservatives.³¹ While Avant speaks to British mercenaries, her use of the term more likely referred to British irregular troops.

While changing views of the British army resulted in personnel changes, Hew Strachan posits that the army reforms of Edward Cardwell cannot be seen as part of a pattern before the Crimean War. Instead, Strachan views the Victorian army under Cardwell and Wolseley as being a post-Crimean phenomenon rather than continuous process from earlier reforms dating back to the 1830s and 1840s. Essentially, according to Strachan, the Crimean War was a watershed moment in the development of the British army.³²

Suffice to conclude that by the time of the Cardwell Reforms, attitudes toward the British army were changing among British citizens. A change in the type of recruit being

³⁰ Ibid., 5.

³¹ Deborah Avant, “From Mercenary to Citizen Armies: Explaining Change in the Practice of War,” *International Organization*, 54 no. 1 (2000), 41-72.

³² Hew Strachan, *Wellington’s Legacy: The Reform of the British Army, 1830-1854* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 1.

sought out, coupled with social developments at home, namely the British social reforms of the later nineteenth century, resulted in the status of British soldiers improving dramatically. As a result of the rise in status, the rise of the citizen army, and the decline of the use of irregulars, a desire to honour not just officers, but all soldiers began to take hold following the Crimean War. This can be seen through the creation of the Victoria Cross. The award was given to any soldier who demonstrated an act of valour throughout the war, no matter their rank or class.

Changing beliefs about death and burials among civilians throughout the nineteenth century and up to the First World War help to explain why the First World War proved to be such a pivotal moment in the evolution of military burial policy. These perspectives took root in the establishment of graves registration organizations during the First World War, which helped to shape burial policy throughout the war. Organizations included the Graves Registration Commission, the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries, the Prince of Wales' Committee, and the Imperial War Graves Commission.

While the subject of burials is under-explored, the Imperial (later the Commonwealth) War Graves Commission has been studied in depth. These studies focus on the formation of the Commission and the underlying reasons for its creation, but do not answer the vital question of how the Commission influenced the evolution of burial policy during the First World War. Furthermore, these studies were typically commissioned or authored by the IWGC itself and tend to be strictly limited to the British creation of the IWGC, while shying away from describing colonial discussions pertaining to the Commission. As various graves organizations were established, a coherent burial policy began to appear on the Western Front during the war. Coupled with a change in the value

of a dead body among British citizens, the evolution of burial policy eventually led to the establishment of the Imperial War Graves Commission, which formalized burial policy, practices, and the procedures that were to occur after death.

One of the first historians to look at graves and burials during the First World War was Desmond Morton. His book *When Your Number's Up* greatly contributed to Canadian military history in the twentieth century and focused on the character of the Canadian soldier. Specifically, Morton asked the question: “what happened to them when they were wounded, captured or killed?”³³ Despite asking this, Morton took a different avenue of analysis and never returned to the question of what happened to soldiers after they were killed. Morton simply hinted at key details, such as the establishment of a Canadian Corps Graves Registration Unit, the dangerous work of retrieval, and the potential for soldiers and military officials to lose track of graves due to various unforeseen circumstances.³⁴

Another historian who has explored the front-line experiences of soldiers is Tim Cook, who wrote a two-volume study of the combat effectiveness of the Canadian Corps during the First World War. The first volume, *At Sharp End*, deals with Canadian involvement from 1914 to 1916; the second, *Shock Troops*, examines the latter years of the war. Cook explored the individual experiences of the soldier on the front lines and how technology, tactics, discipline, and morale of the soldiers affected their combat effectiveness.³⁵ Much like Morton, Cook provided limited details on the burial of the dead in the two-volume study, merely explaining that soldiers felt an obligation to bury their

³³ Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993), vii.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 231-232.

³⁵ Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadian Fighting in the Great War, 1914-1916* (Toronto: Penguin Group, 2007), 4, Tim Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1917-1918* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2009).

comrades. Cook also highlighted that in some cases, soldiers' bodies were booby-trapped by the enemy, resulting in a need to balance ensuring that identification was made and families back in Canada were notified, with the safety of living soldiers. Additionally, Cook explained the use of identification tags by Canada and Britain, the abandonment of bodies on the front, and the state of some bodies when buried.³⁶ Although Cook's work is an expansion on the knowledge of burials during the war, it is focused on other aspects of the war.

Cook also wrote a follow-up article that detailed the personal experiences of soldiers in the trenches. This article focused on soldiers' spiritual beliefs and reactions to death and burials, highlighting the need to become desensitized to the sight of death, bodies, or body parts. In fact, in some cases, soldiers developed morbid traditions, such as shaking an arm protruding from a trench wall to cope with death and burial from war.³⁷ Such traditions helped desensitize soldiers to the prospect of their own death.

There has been substantially more curiosity among both historians and the general public in the later stages of the burial process, namely the commemoration of collective sacrifice, and not the initial burial of the soldier himself. Out of the First World War emerged the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC), the precursor to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Since the IWGC intended to consolidate the burial policies of Britain and the Dominions, it is important to explore the history of the Commission when looking at questions pertaining to the recovery and burial of war dead. Originally mandated with maintaining the graves of British and Dominion troops, the

³⁶ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 274-275.

³⁷ Tim Cook, "Grave Beliefs: Stories of the Supernatural and the Uncanny among Canada's Great War Trench Soldiers," *Journal of Military History* 77 #2 (April 2013).

IWGC was later assigned the burial of Commonwealth soldiers from the Second World War. One of the first studies of the organization was Fabian Ware's *The Immortal Heritage*, which highlights the precursors to the IWGC, as well as the achievements of the Commission until 1937.³⁸ Although providing an interesting read and describing some fascinating policy decisions that led to the birth of the IWGC, the book acts as a springboard for a much more comprehensive study of the institution.

Philip Longworth's *The Unending Vigil* extends Ware's work well past the First World War. Longworth included more details on the interwar period and provides a complete history of the IWGC by analysing the first fifty years of its political, constitutional, administrative, financial, social, and technical history.³⁹ It is important to note that Longworth was chief historian of the Commission when he wrote this work. In line with Longworth are Major Edwin Gibson and G. Kingsley Ward, who published a study of the Commission entitled *Courage Remembered*. Gibson and Ward's study is a comprehensive account of the early years of the IWGC up to and including the Second World War. Gibson and Ward listed three main reasons for publishing their study: first, to help perpetuate the memory of war dead; second, to relate the background of the IWGC for those who may visit the cemeteries; and third, to outline the work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.⁴⁰ This study ultimately provides a complete history of the creation and maintenance of IWGC cemeteries. Despite being such an excellent – and one

³⁸ Fabian Ware, *The Immortal Heritage: An Account of the Work and Policy of the Imperial War Graves Commission during Twenty Years, 1917-1937* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 23-26.

³⁹ Philip Longworth, *The Unending Vigil: A History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 1917-1967* (London: Constable & Company LTD, 1967), xiii.

⁴⁰ The Imperial War Graves Commission changed its name to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in 1960. For the purpose of this section, the older name will be used.

Major Edwin Gibson and G. Kingsley Ward, *Courage Remembered: The Story Behind the Construction and Maintenance of the Commonwealth's Military Cemeteries and Memorials of the Wars of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1989), xi.

of the few – studies of the Commission, it lacks a discussion of the early inter-governmental debates that took place between Commonwealth countries and Britain. Furthermore, both Longworth’s and Gibson and Ward’s works were ordered by the IWGC to detail the historical facts of the formation of the Commission.

Other modern studies include works by Julie Summers and Jeroen Geurst. Summers’ book *Remembered* tends to focus on the architectural side of cemeteries and has little detail about the foundation of the IWGC, overlooking many of the early debates.⁴¹ Geurst’s book *Cemeteries of the Great War* focuses on the formation and architecture of the IWGC cemeteries and only briefly looks at the foundations of the IWGC.⁴² Furthermore, Geurst includes sections explaining the design work behind the eventual IWGC cemeteries by Edwin Lutyen and Gertude Jekyll. The two had worked collaboratively prior to the First World War and following the war, they worked together to design the British gardens and cemeteries dedicated to the fallen. Lutyen worked on the cemetery design, sending Jekyll the plans so she could make planting proposals.⁴³ Some famous designs include the Bethune Town Cemetery, Serre Road Cemetery No. 2, and Warlincourt Halte British Cemetery.

The latest work on the Commission is David Crane’s study *Empire of the Dead*. A biographical work about Fabian Ware, it explored Ware’s exploits that led to the formation of the Commission. This included Ware’s attempts to register graves while with the Mobile

⁴¹ Julie Summers, *Remembered: The History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (London: Merrell, 2007).

⁴² Jeroen Geurst, *Cemeteries of the Great War By Sir Edwin Lutyens* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2010).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 37-39.

Red Cross Unit, his later attempts to create a war graves commission, and his desire to apply the Commission's equality upon death principle.⁴⁴

British and American works on the recovery, burial, and identification of soldiers can provide a framework for a Canadian study of burials. Such studies have only been written within the last five years. One of the first was by Michael Sledge. *Soldier Dead* is a detailed analysis of the recovery, identification, burial, and commemoration of fallen soldiers from the United States. Sledge asked "what happens to members of the [American] Armed Forces when they die?"⁴⁵ He frequently challenged the commonly held beliefs about the use and removal of dog tags and that bodies were usually brought back for burial. Instead, he explored the system of recovery that was established during the American Civil War and showed the gradual, and at times radical, evolution of such policies. Sledge also described the forensic process behind identification, and the important reasons for recovering troops beyond morale or national prestige. Sledge explained that practicality was also important since leaving a body in a hostile country was sometimes impossible. He cited the Vietnam War, explaining that it would not be realistic for the US government to tend to graves there.⁴⁶ Sledge's work explores many topics relevant to the Canadian experience including the use of dog tags. Further, his analysis of the forensic process of identification, while not explored in this dissertation, is useful for studies of Canadian burial policy in later conflicts, such as the Second World War or the Korean War.

⁴⁴ David Crane, *Empire of the Dead: How One Man's Vision led to the Creation of WWI's War Graves* (London: William Collins, 2013).

⁴⁵ Michael Sledge, *Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury, and Honor our Military Fallen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

Lisa Budreau took a more in-depth look at the return of American soldiers' bodies during the First World War in *Bodies of War*. However, the specific focus of Budreau's book was the commemorative efforts of the United States. As a result of American attempts to unite the divided social strata of the nation, American commemoration of the war was riddled with stories of exploitation and experimentation masqueraded as attempts to honour America's war dead.⁴⁷ Budreau also believed that these social and political dynamics later shaped America's memory of the war, leading to a diffusion of memory about the role the United States had played.⁴⁸ Budreau clearly outlined how the American approach to burials was different from that of other Allied countries in that the United States gave families the chance to bring soldiers back to be buried on American soil. Because this led to a scattering of First World War graves across the United States, there was a lack of interest in commemorating those still buried overseas. Budreau's work is interesting in regards to a related Canadian study. The American approach to burials during the First World War included repatriation, something that was favoured in Canada, but rejected by France and Britain, resulting in the inability of Canadians to repatriate soldiers. Yet, this did not stop Canadians from commonly referencing the American policy of allowing repatriations.

Chris Dickon also published a study of American war dead buried on foreign territory, exploring the early ideas of the "stateless soldier" in his book *The Foreign Burial of American War Dead*.⁴⁹ Although the stateless, unnamed soldier was not fighting for the United States when he was buried in Paris, he was still a decorated American soldier who

⁴⁷ Lisa Budreau, *Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in the United States, 1919-1933* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 1.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 242-243.

⁴⁹ The Stateless soldier is believed to be John Paul Jones, a British citizen who fought for the Americans during the American Revolutionary War, but died outside the United States. Jones was not allowed to be repatriated to the United States upon his death, hence the title "Stateless Soldier."

fought during the Revolutionary War (1775-1783). Despite this, the United States did not initially recognize his right to be buried in the continental United States.⁵⁰ Dickon carried on his analysis by exploring the continual changes in American attitudes to foreign burial of American soldiers, the first of which happened during Theodore Roosevelt's tenure as President. Dickon ended his comprehensive study with the Vietnam War, which showed the need to repatriate soldiers from hostile countries.⁵¹

The British perspective, like the American, has also provided different frameworks that can be applied to Canada's role in burials. During the First World War, Canadian troops served in the British military system, so Canadian burial practices were directly related to British practices. By analysing British examples of burials, and soldiers' experiences with burials, there will be a better understanding of Canadian burials since Canadian burial practices tended to mirror the British.

It will be important to examine four vital subjects in order to understand the formation and evolution of Canadian burial policy: burials in the nineteenth century, in the Second Boer War (1899-1902), in the First World War (1914-1918), and the formation of the British Imperial War Graves Commission, later re-named the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Since the Imperial War Graves Commission and the question of commemoration encompass wide-ranging matters spanning a broad time period, the Commission will be covered at its inception, while the questions of commemoration faced by the commission will be explored toward the end of the dissertation.

⁵⁰ Chris Dickon, *The Foreign Burial of American War Dead: A History* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2011), 4-5.

⁵¹ Dickon touches on aspects of the Gulf War, but his work is not comprehensive enough to mention as his work only briefly touches on the war.

The first chapter examines Britain and Canadian burial policy from the War of 1812 to the end of the Boer War. The Boer War was the first major foreign expedition in which Canadian troops were involved. However, very little is known about front-line burials during this conflict. Studies have explored the traditional questions of the Boer War, such as the political reasons for the war and Canada's involvement, yet the question of burials is notably absent in these studies.⁵² This should come as no surprise as there are still considerable gaps in the historiography of the Boer War even though more than a century has elapsed since its conclusion. One likely reason for the considerable gaps is the interest among historians in subsequent conflicts.

The primary focus will be how Britain, and later Canada, conducted soldiers' burials during wartime. It will explore the evolving ideology in Britain surrounding the culture of death and dying. The chapter will then interweave changing British culture with reforms in the British military system to demonstrate how civilian thought on death permeated the military structure in the late nineteenth century. The chapter will then conclude with introducing the twentieth century, the Boer War, and the emergence of public concern for military graves and cemeteries.

The second, third, and fourth chapters will focus on Canada in the First World War. The second chapter will focus on the Canadian burial perspective throughout the First World War and how front-line soldiers buried their own after death. This includes the policies and practices that military headquarters and individual soldiers were forced to

⁵² For studies on the Boer War, see: Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (New York: Random House, 1979), Carman Miller, *Paining the Map Red: Canada and the South African War, 1899-1902* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1993), Carman Miller, *Canada's Little War: Fighting for the British Empire in Southern Africa, 1899-1902* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Ltd, Publishers, 2003), Brian Reid, *Our Little Army in the Field: The Canadians in South Africa, 1899-1902* (St. Catharines, Ontario: Vanwell Publishing Limited, 1996), and Jack Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

create, adopt, and later alter to fit within the framework of warfare. Furthermore, the continued evolution of warfare also led to an evolution of how soldiers were buried on the front, specifically in periods of particularly heavy loss.

The third chapter will explore the military and civilian reactions to burials during and after the war. It will explore the psychological impact on soldiers and morale, and look at the great lengths to which soldiers went to ensure that their fallen comrades were given a final resting place. While soldiers were forced to bury the dead, civilians were also affected by death and loss. Thus, this chapter will also explore the civilian reactions to some of the military decisions during wartime, specifically the decision to bury soldiers with their comrades.

The fourth chapter will deal with the structure of the grave identification and marking organizations throughout the First World War. These were largely British-run; however, Canada fought as part of the British Empire during the First World War and was obligated to follow British policy throughout the war. The chapter will begin with an analysis of the British Red Cross Society (BRCS), continuing with the formation of the Graves Registration Commission (GRC), its merger with the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries (DGR&E), and finally the Prince of Wales' Committee, later the Imperial War Graves Commission.

The fifth chapter will explore the issues of exhumation, consolidation, and repatriation, the three main burial issues that continually changed throughout the war, and after. It will analyse initial repatriations, the later shift to French nationalization of bodies buried in France, and attempts to bring bodies back to Britain and Canada. It will conclude

with a case study of Anna Durie, a woman from Canada who defied the entire IWGC and repatriated the remains of her son back to Toronto.

Burial policy has radically changed from the nineteenth century into the twentieth century, with some of the biggest changes occurring because of the First World War. These changes were due to a mix of factors. While modern warfare required a dramatic shift in how to treat the great number of dead bodies on the front, public perceptions on how to treat a body after death also changed throughout the nineteenth century. The old military usage of mass graves was replaced by the need to provide separate graves to honour each body as an individual soldier.

Though occurring largely during the Boer War, signs of a shift started to become evident as early as the Crimean War. Following the Boer War, some voices expressed a renewed interest in former gravesites and cemeteries. However, the First World War acted as the catalyst for real change in how soldiers were buried during conflict. No longer were mass graves or haphazard cemeteries and gravesites acceptable to soldiers or civilians. Instead, the need for a Christian burial touched the national psyche of both soldier and civilian. Furthermore, the need to honour a fallen comrade, which had existed before conflicts of the nineteenth century, flourished throughout the First World War, resulting in soldiers taking extraordinary actions to ensure that fallen comrades were given final respects, a resting place, and a spot for loved ones to honour after the war. This gave soldiers on the front a way to commemorate their fallen, which inevitably led to the larger forms of commemoration after the First World War had concluded.

Chapter 1: British Burial Practices during the Nineteenth Century

To better understand burials during the First World War, a basic understanding of what burials looked like before 1914, particularly throughout the nineteenth century, is needed. From the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815) and the War of 1812 (1812-1815) to later conflicts such as the Crimean War (1853-1856) and the Boer War (1899-1902), there were small, but noticeable changes in the way in which a body was buried. In fact, in the nineteenth century the treatment of bodies evolved, from viewing the body solely as a raw resource to seeing it as part of a ritual that was laden with emotional value.

During the Napoleonic Wars, a soldier's body was treated as a resource of limited value. Very little emotional value was placed on the burial of a body. Instead, burials took place out of necessity in order to reduce the potential spread of disease and to ensure the morale of troops did not decline due to the scattered and decomposing bodies left on battlefields. By the time of the Crimean War, British public perceptions of burials shifted from treating a body like a resource to considering the emotions of next-of-kin and the need to ensure a final resting place. While the treatment of the body was still poor in some cases, a clear distinction can be made between burials in earlier wars and burials during the Crimean War. After the war, British political and military officials attempted to maintain the graves of British servicemen who perished in Crimea. Despite the early attempts to change how a soldier was buried on the front and attempts to increase caring for bodies, the early reforms were a failure. Very little changed. It took another thirty years and changes in British civilian beliefs before military burial policy achieved the same level of care as civilian burials.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the different methods used when burying soldiers during British and Imperial conflicts throughout the nineteenth century. A clear understanding of nineteenth century burial practices is required before a complete and comprehensive study of burial practices in later conflicts, such as the First World War, can be undertaken. In addition, civilian burial practices also need to be examined to see how changes in the civilian view of death impacted how the body of a soldier was valued. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, British thinking towards death and burials underwent significant changes. These changes, coupled with attempts to reform the British Army following the disastrous Crimean campaign, allowed for civilian-held beliefs on death and burial to permeate the military. As a result, burial practices observed in the Second Boer War were inherently different than burial practices from earlier campaigns, including the Crimean War.

1.1 The Napoleonic Wars – Early Nineteenth Century Burial and Commemoration Controversies

While not outlining British burials directly, French accounts of burials during the Napoleonic Wars give a good indication on how a soldier's body was treated during the conflict. There were three ways a body could be disposed of during the Napoleonic Wars: burial, burning, or decomposition. While each were distinct from one another, none of these methods were particularly kind to the soldiers' bodies. Captain Jean-Roche Coignet, a French soldier in the Battle of Marengo (14 June 1800), noted the practice of burning bodies in French conflicts prior to the Napoleonic Wars:

I came out with my heart rent with grief, but a more horrible spectacle was to be seen on the plain. We saw the battle-field covered with Austrian and French soldiers who were picking up the dead and placing them in piles and

dragging them along with their musket straps. Men and horses were laid pell-mell in the same heap, and set on fire in order to preserve us from pestilence. The scattered bodies had a little earth thrown over them to cover them.¹

Bodies were burned to avoid the spread of disease among the surviving soldiers of a battle. The practice attributed little emotional value to the burial of the soldier, and did not imply the need for any form of commemoration after. Instead, the act of clearing a battlefield was more a necessity for reasons of hygiene. Here, the focus was more on the wellbeing of the living than the dead. This practice continued throughout the Napoleonic Wars. Again, Coignet noted examples of the practice used after the Battle of Borodino (7 September 1812):

We passed the night on the battle-field, and the next day the Emperor had all the wounded taken up. This task made us shudder; the ground was covered with Russian muskets: near their field hospitals there were piles of dead bodies and heaps of limbs which had been amputated. [Joachim-Napoleon] Murat pursued them so rapidly that they burned up their wounded men; we found them charred skeletons. That shows how much they value their soldiers.²

Another example, however, occurred after the Battle of Waterloo, when peasants were hired to clean up the battlefield: “The pyres had been burning for eight days and by then the fire was being fed solely by human fat. There were thighs, arms and legs piled up in a heap and some fifty workmen, with handkerchiefs over their noses, were raking the fire and the bones with long forks.”³

While burning bodies was used as an extreme measure to keep disease away, the most typical method of discarding bodies was burial. Again, Captain Coignet provided an

¹ Jean-Roch Coignet, *The Note-Books of Captain Coignet, Soldier of the Empire*, edited by Jean Fortescue (New York: Robert M. McBride & Company, 1929), 81.

² *Ibid.*, 225.

³ Bernard Cornwell, *Waterloo: The True Story of Four Days, Three Armies and Three Battles* (New York: William Collins, 2014), 325.

example of the way in which bodies were buried after death: “the battle-field was covered with the dead and wounded; their cries were blended into one great shriek. One can convey no idea of that terrible day. The next day was employed in digging ditches to bury the dead, and in carrying the wounded to field-hospitals.”⁴ Coignet later explained that there were plenty of Russian and French deaths at the field hospitals in Moscow: “every morning the wagons were loaded with the dead; and I had to see that they were buried, having them dumped from the wagons into holes twenty feet deep. It was impossible to describe such a sight.”⁵ While Coignet’s example shows an improvement of burial practices, there was still no individualization of graves during the Napoleonic Wars – burial was normally done solely out of necessity. However, there were instances when troops cared for their fallen comrades after a successful battle. For example, French General Philippe de Segur noted that after the Battle of Smolensk, troops took the time to collect or assist their own dying and to “pay the last duties to our own dead, before we think of those belonging to the enemy.”⁶ Though rare, instances such as this show the emotional side to burials, albeit in little detail.

To bury the dead after a significant battle was sometimes onerous. After the Battle of Eylau (7 February 1807), the bodies of fallen soldiers were scattered across the battlefield. The *Sixty-Fourth Bulletin of the Grand Army* quoted a French soldier as noting that “it required great labour to bury all the dead... Forty-eight hours after the battle, there were still upwards of 500 wounded Russians whom we had not been able to carry off.”⁷

⁴ Coignet, *The Note-Books of Captain Coignet, Soldier of the Empire*, 145.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁶ Philippe de Ségur, *History of the Expedition to Russia Undertaken by the Emperor Napoleon in the Year 1812*, Vol. I (London, Treuttel and Wurtz, Treuttel jun and Richter, 1825), 241.

⁷ Jacques Peuchet, *Campaigns of the Armies of France, in Prussia, Saxony, and Poland*, translated by Samuel MacKay, Vol. 4 (Boston, Farrand, Mallory, and Co. Suffolk Buildings, Belcher and Armstrong Printers, 1808), 201.

When time and conditions allowed, proper burials were conducted. De Ségur further observed during the French advance to Mojaisk, that the road leading to the city was uncovered and “perfectly clear, and without a single fragment of men, carriages, or dress. All their [Russian] dead had been buried, for they have a religious respect for the dead.”⁸ Thus, in addition to the practical need to bury soldiers, a religious aspect was also attributed to their burial.

Finally, in extreme circumstances, bodies were sometimes left to decompose on the battlefield; typically, this option was only taken when in retreat from the enemy, or when there were simply no men left to bury the dead. The *Fifty-Second Bulletin of the Grand Army* from 1807 detailed how the 8th Corps of the Grand Army took the town of Wollin in Poland. During their retreat, the Prussians left “many dead in the town of Wollin, the streets of which are strewn with Prussian dead bodies.”⁹ In another instance, Russian soldiers led by Count Pahlen were pursued for approximately eleven kilometres, and forced to leave 1200 dead soldiers on the battlefield.¹⁰ Both examples show the necessity of abandoning the deceased in order to ensure the survival of troops while retreating.

De Ségur’s memoirs illustrated another example of bodies being left to decompose on the battlefield. Detailing the conditions at Borodino during the retreat from Moscow, de Ségur’s explained that

After passing the Kologa, we marched on, absorbed in thought, when some of us, raising our eyes, uttered a cry of horror. Each one instantly looked about him, and there lay stretched before us a plain trampled, bare, and devastated, all the trees cut down within a few feet from the surface, and farther off craggy hills, the highest of which appeared misshapen, and bore a striking resemblance to an extinguished volcano. The ground

⁸ de Ségur, *History of the Expedition to Russia Undertaken by the Emperor Napoleon in the Year 1812*, 364.

⁹ Peuchet, *Campaigns of the Armies of France, in Prussia, Saxony, and Poland*, 155.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 167.

around us was everywhere covered with fragments of helmets and cuirasses, with broken drums, gun-stocks, tatters of uniforms, and standards dyed with blood. On this desolate spot lay thirty thousand half-devoured corpses; while a pile of skeletons on the summit of one of the hills overlooked the whole. It seems as though death had here fixed his throne.¹¹

Here, there were simply no troops left to bury the fallen, or those who were left were in such dire condition that to expend the time required to bury the substantial number of dead would have meant certain death for the living.

Burials were often rushed following large battles due to the need to advance on a retreating army. In these cases, soldiers paid their respects to the best of their abilities; however, these attempts were sometimes not enough. In his memoirs, Adrien Bourgogne, a French sergeant, described his arrival at the Moskowa battlefield forty-five days after the famous battle:

On the 28th we started very early, and during the day, after passing over a little river, we arrived at the famous battlefield (the Moskowa), covered all over with the dead and with débris of all kinds. Legs, arms, and heads lay on the ground. Most of the bodies were Russians, as ours had been buried, as far as possible; but, as everything had been very hastily done, the heavy rain had uncovered many of them. It was a sad spectacle, the dead bodies hardly retaining a human resemblance.¹²

While in some cases the bodies of soldiers were abandoned, there were instances where the natural environment unearthed bodies that had been hastily buried after a battle.

Treatment of the body itself was atrocious at best during the Napoleonic Wars, ranging from bodies left to rot to bodies pulled apart for necessary ‘natural resources.’ For

¹¹ Philippe de Ségur, *History of the Expedition to Russia Undertaken by the Emperor Napoleon in the Year 1812*, Vol. II (London, Bradbury and Evans, Printers, Whitefriars, 1840), 128-129.

¹² Adrien Bourgogne, *Memoirs of Sergeant Bourgogne, 1812-1813*, ed. Paul Cottin (New York: Doubleday & McClure Company, 1899), 60.

example, bodies were routinely picked apart for essential equipment and clothing to ensure the survival of living soldiers. French soldier Jean Baptiste de Marbot, later Baron de Marbot, detailed his experience lying among the dead:

Stretched on the snow among the piles of dead and dying, unable to move in any way, I gradually and without pain lost consciousness.... I judge that my swoon lasted four hours, and when I came to my sense I found myself in this horrible position. I was completely naked, having nothing on but my hat and my right boot. A man of the transport corps, thinking me dead, had stripped me in the usual fashion, and wishing to pull off the only boot that remained, was dragging me by one leg with his foot against my body. The jerk which the man gave me no doubt had restored me to my senses. I succeeded in sitting up and spitting out the clots of blood from my throat. The shock caused by the wind of the ball had produced such an extravasation of blood, that my face, shoulders, and chest were black, while the rest of my body was stained red by the blood from my wound. My hat and my hair were full of bloodstained snow, and as I rolled my haggard eyes I must have been horrible to see. Anyhow, the transport man looked the other way, and went off with my property without my being able to say a single word to him, so utterly prostrate was I.¹³

Equipment, resources and rations were necessary to continue the war effort against Russia. To leave vital rations or equipment on a corpse was considered wasteful since those same resources could benefit the war effort. Resources also included the very clothes that soldiers were wearing, as was seen through de Marbot's experience of being stripped naked. Furthermore, de Marbot noted that he observed the same soldier who had stripped him of his clothing and belongings as having done the same to another dead man.¹⁴ While there were numerous instances of poor treatment of bodies during the Napoleonic Wars, there were also instances when soldiers did treat bodies with respect. For example, after the Battle of Eylau (7 February 1807), Captain Coignet noted that the bodies of his unit's

¹³ Jean-Baptiste de Marbot, *The Memoirs of Baron de Marbot: Late Lieutenant-General in the French Army*, translated by Arthur John Butler, Vol. 1, (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1892), 267.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 268-269.

dead were dragged to the other side of the mountain while in retreat, rather than being left in the middle of the battlefield to decompose.¹⁵

Following the Napoleonic Wars, civilians began to scrutinize the treatment of the dead during the war. In a newspaper article published in *The London Observer* on 18 November 1822, significant criticism was aimed at the treatment of war heroes from the Napoleonic Wars. The unnamed author explained that approximately one million bushels of human and animal bones were imported to the Port of Hull from Continental Europe the previous year. The bones were collected from neighbourhoods such as Leipzig, Austerlitz, Waterloo, and other places where the principal battles were fought. Upon entry to Great Britain, the bones were shipped to Yorkshire and sent through a bone grinder to produce granulated bone, also known as bone meal.¹⁶

Once the bones had been processed, they were then shipped to Doncaster, one of the largest agricultural markets in Great Britain at the time, to be used for agricultural purposes. There, the bone meal would be sold to farmers to fertilize their agricultural lands.¹⁷ The author posited that a dead soldier was “a most valuable article of commerce.” He explained that better manure could be made from the oily substance extracted from human and animal bones. Finally, the author noted that inadvertently, Yorkshire farmers were indebted to the bones of their children for the daily bread they ate, and to British warfare itself. By sending soldiers to fight on the European continent and then importing

¹⁵ Coignet, *The Note-Books of Captain Coignet, Soldier of the Empire*, 142.

¹⁶ Unknown, “Miscellaneous: Chiefly Domestic – War and Commerce,” *The London Observer*, November 18, 1822, accessed February 10, 2017, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/docview/473851385?accountid=15115>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

their bones back as soil fertilizer, Great Britain treated soldiers as an instrument of war, an instrument of commerce, and an instrument of survival.¹⁸

Though it is entirely possible that the *London Observer* article was satirical, it is still an important source to help understand the treatment of British soldiers during the late Georgian and Victorian Eras in Great Britain. If this article was in fact written satirically, then at the very least it cannot be denied that its aim was to illuminate and improve the poor treatment of soldiers' bodies after death. If the article was not satire, then it is vital in establishing the monetary and agricultural value associated with soldiers' bodies after death.¹⁹ The *London Observer* brings out an important aspect of burials during the nineteenth century: burials were done for practical purposes – the need to put bodies in the grounds. Burial for emotional purposes, specifically the need for closure after death, were not done at this time.

In fact, it is evident that the burial of a soldier during early nineteenth-century campaigns was merely an afterthought and was carried out due to practical needs more than emotional ones. Here, an important distinction needs to be made between the practical need to bury a body and the emotional need to bury a body. For purposes of practicality, a body was buried to prevent the spread of disease, to clear it from the battlefield, and to record the death of a soldier. Not entirely unrelated, emotional sentiment resulted in the need to provide a final resting place for a comrade, to provide closure for fellow soldiers, and to keep the morale of troops from declining. Historical studies, such as those by David

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Other famous literature such as Charles Dickens' *The Battle of Life* support the idea of corpses being laid to rest in farmers' fields.

Cannadine, Joanna Bourke, and Pat Jalland, show that people tended to be have a growing interest in the emotional side of burials over the practical side.²⁰

An example of burial for practical purposes can be found in an article in *The Guardian* from 2003, which noted the discovery of a mass grave in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. The grave contained the bodies of three thousand French soldiers ranging in age from fifteen to twenty-five years of age. It was understood that the soldiers had died from hunger, disease, or exposure while retreating from Moscow. They were then buried in a mass grave in the very trench they had dug to fortify Vilnius only six months earlier.²¹ Arguably, mass graves do not necessarily denote appalling conditions relating to burials. The number of casualties suffered during the retreat coupled with the time of year would potentially have caused a chaotic situation when trying to bury soldiers.

However, first-hand accounts from both the Napoleonic Wars and subsequent years give similar depictions of the brutal conditions experienced by wounded and dying soldiers. Robert Wilson, a British officer attached to the Russian general staff, described the conditions at a French military hospital in Vilnius, as

the most awful and hideous sight: 7,500 bodies were piled up like pigs of lead over one another in the corridors. Carcasses were strewn about in every part; and all the broken windows and walls were stuffed with feet,

²⁰ See: David Cannadine, "War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain," in *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death*, ed Joachim Whaley, (London: Europa Publications Limited, 1981), Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face to Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), and Pat Jalland, *Death in War and Peace: A History of Loss and Grief in England 1914-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²¹ Ian Traynor, "After 190 years the bones of Boney's army are unearthed in a mass grave in Lithuania," *The Guardian*, September 3, 2002, Accessed February 10, 2017, <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/188976956?accountid=15115>. Ian Traynor, "Frozen Victims of 1812 get final burial," *The Guardian*, June 2, 2003, accessed February 10, 2017, <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/189130792?accountid=15115>.

legs, arms, hands, trunks and heads to fit the apertures, and keep out the air from the yet living.²²

Burial conditions were similarly horrifying in Great Britain, as outlined in a letter from 14 September 1826 and sent to Lord Palmerston, the Secretary of War. The letter was written by Reverend Henry Turmine, the Rector of Minster on the Isle of Sheppey, Kent, who complained of the treatment that troops from the 67th Regiment showed the dead while burying Roman Catholic soldiers. In the first, a corpse was violently dragged out of the church while the Reverend was performing the burial service, and hurried to the grave.²³ On another occasion, the same party of soldiers went to the church with another corpse. They refused to conform to the Rites of the Church and forcefully interred the corpse without allowing the service to be read. Yet another instance included a corpse being buried in the churchyard without an official performing the final rites or an entry made in the churchyard books. Although Turmine listed the issue of soldiers not paying their respects to the dead, his frustration was twofold, as the laws of the church were infringed upon. As a result, Reverend Turmine did not receive the proper fees guaranteed to him.²⁴

By 2 October 1826, the captain of the 67th Regiment ordered a Court of Inquiry. The Court of Inquiry predominantly revolved around the actions of the soldiers and the payment of fees. Ultimately, the Chaplain General sided with the soldiers on all issues and made the recommendation that there had been a misunderstanding. However, the Chaplain General was unable to make a ruling about the truth of the statement that the soldiers most

²² Ian Traynor, "After 190 years the bones of Boney's army are unearthed in a mass grave in Lithuania," *The Guardian*, September 3, 2002, Accessed February 10, 2017, <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/188976956?accountid=15115>.

²³ The National Archives, War Office Fonds, Box WO 43/262, Folder 47-63, Isle of Sheppey, Kent: Complaint of Revd. Henry Turmine, rector of Minster on the 'outrageous conduct' of troops of 67th regiment at burials of Roman Catholic soldiers, Reverend Henry Turmine to Lord Palmerston, 14 September 1826.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

violently removed the corpse from the church and buried it in the churchyard.²⁵ Although this story could not be verified, it still calls into question how soldiers were treated after death by the military. Still, Reverend Turmine's own motives need to be examined. His main concern was not for soldiers' bodies; instead, he focused more on sectarian issues of the church and burials. This case did show that there was a marked lack of concern for bodies in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Furthermore, burials were completed more for practical reasons and not emotional reasons.

Early references to burials in the mid-Victorian era can be found in a letter dated 28 August 1845 from John Macdonald to Lieutenant-Colonel Lquire [sic] of the 13th Prince Albert's Light Infantry. The letter raised the issue of burial of Roman Catholic soldiers. Macdonald noted that if Catholic clergymen could not be admitted to the burial ground and objected to the performance of the burial service of a Catholic soldier by a Protestant clergyman, the latter could not be required to perform the service against the objection. Macdonald also noted that in cases where a Catholic clergyman expressed a desire to have the remains of a Catholic soldier buried where he could be admitted to perform the service according to the Rites of the Catholic Church, no objection could be made to the arrangement.²⁶

1.2 The Crimean War and Burials

The biggest shift in attitudes towards burials and graves occurred around the time of the Crimean War (1854-1856). The likely reason was the growing shift in British public

²⁵ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 43/262, Folder 47-63, Isle of Sheppey, Kent. Complaint of Revd. Henry Turmine, rector of Minster on the 'outrageous conduct' of troops of 67th regiment at burials of Roman Catholic soldiers, Chaplain General to the Rev. H. Turmine, 24 November 1826.

²⁶ TNA, Office of the Commander-in-Chief: Out Letters Fonds, Box WO 3/472 - Regiment Letters Aug. to Nov. 1845, John Macdonald to Lt-Colonel Lquire, 28 August 1845.

views on death and mourning as outlined by historian Philippe Ariès.²⁷ Though there were very few official records of burials during the war itself, there were recorded instances of attempts to mark, preserve, and honour graves of the Crimean War. For instance, in his memoirs, Sir Daniel Lysons, commander of the 2nd Brigade of the Light Division, noted civility between the warring sides when dealing with deaths and burials. In one case, a halt in fighting was ordered for two days to allow soldiers to bury the dead and collect wounded comrades.²⁸ In another instance, Lysons noted a raised flag of truce to allow for burial of the dead, although this brief truce was followed by heavy shelling the next day.²⁹ Finally, the two sides agreed to an armistice to allow the Russians to bury their own dead. During the armistice, British and Russian soldiers crossed in front of their defences and talked amongst one another, asking for commanding officers, acknowledging the killed and wounded, and engaging in other general conversation.³⁰

Burials themselves were typically carried out by British chaplains during the war. Archdeacon Henry Press Wright, the principal Church of England chaplain to the forces in Crimea, detailed the duties of chaplains on the front. The duties included their tireless work of burying the dead. Reverend Wright explained that he did not understand how the clergymen could stand the work in the Crimean camps, noting that “they are from morning to night in hospitals, or on horseback, or burying the dead.”³¹

The memoirs of Douglas Arthur Reid, Assistant Surgeon of the 90th Light Infantry during the Crimean War, give more gruesome details on burials. Reid explained that while

²⁷ Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, translated by Helen Weaver (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 409, 610-11.

²⁸ Sir Daniel Lysons, *The Crimean War from First to Last* (London: John Murray, 1895), 107

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 189.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 168.

³¹ Donald H. Simpson, “Henry Press Wright: First Archdeacon of Columbia,” *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 19 (1955): 131.

British burials were completed in poor order during the war, French burials were worse, as the French did not bury their dead with bands playing or military honours. As Reid describes:

Certainly all our arrangements were bad enough, but, as far as I could judge, the French were in a worse plight, and both the deaths and sickness in their camp much greater than in ours. But they did not bury their dead with bands playing or any sort of military honours in the daytime. In returning from Balaklava late in the evening, I have seen waggon-loads [sic] of dead bodies carried out of the French camp, in the rear of the light Division, to be buried in pits in ravines. I have a vivid recollection of our astonishment when we read in the newspapers the glowing accounts of the state of the French army as compared with our own. Of course, the explanation is that the French Press was censored while ours was not, and war correspondents had a free run.³²

Reid also detailed the way in which the British treated Russian war dead. Specifically, British soldiers had launched a surprise attack on the Russians, which resulted in a significant number of casualties on the Russian side. Following the offensive, the British dumped the Russian bodies “over the parapet for their comrades to bury.”³³ While minor occurrences such as this appeared throughout the Crimean War, there were other instances when great respect was paid to enemy combatants. The probable reason for the wide range of treatment toward enemy dead was likely the harsh conditions in which the Crimean War was fought. Specifically, Arthur Henry Taylor, an assistant surgeon with the British Army, detailed the systematic slaughter of British wounded trapped on the battlefield during some of the fiercest combats.³⁴

³² Douglas Arthur Reid, *Memories of the Crimean War: January 1855 to June 1856* (London: The St. Catherine Press, 1911), 24.

³³ *Ibid.*, 55.

³⁴ Arthur Henry Taylor to his parents, 11 November 1845, RAMC/156, Royal Army Medical Corps Archives, Wellcome Library, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b19610439>.

Like Taylor, British war artist and correspondent William Simpson described scenes of burial after the Battle of Malakoff (8 September 1855). Walking through the Malakoff redoubt, Simpson noted French soldiers burying their dead Russian counterparts: “They carried them from all parts of the Malakoff to the top of the parapet at the rear, and threw them into the ditch. It is upon this spot that the Russian have since built a commemorative chapel.”³⁵ As in the Napoleonic Wars, large-scale burials after significant battles were still conducted by using ditches or other battlefield terrain that had the capacity to accommodate large groups of soldiers’ bodies.

Meanwhile, the bodies of officers were treated differently. This should be no surprise as rankers were typically treated as second class to officers and too uncivilized to ever attain a commission. Following the assault on Sevastopol, Frederick Vieth, of the British forces witnessed the bodies of the officers who had fallen during the battle being brought in by fatigue parties for interment at the Cathcart Hill Cemetery. While officers’ bodies were brought to the cemetery, Vieth explained that “large fatigue parties were employed in burying the dead about the Redan.”³⁶ Vieth’s memoirs were supported by other works, such as *Letters from the Army in the Crimea*, which also depicted fatigue parties going about their duty to ensure officers’ burials were completed.³⁷

While bodies generally received poor treatment during the burial procedures, those bodies that were not buried fared even worse. Simpson detailed the standard practice of pilfering the bodies of deceased soldiers, explaining in one section of his autobiography

³⁵ William Simpson, *The Autobiography of William Simpson, R.I.*, ed. George Eyre-Todd (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903), 61.

³⁶ Frederick Harris D. Vieth, *Recollections of the Crimean Campaign and the Expedition to Kinburn in 1855* (Montreal: John Lovel and Son, Limited, 1907), 41-42.

³⁷ Unknown (A Staff-Officer who was there), *Letters from the Army in the Crimea: Written During the years 1854, 1855, & 1856* (London: Robson, Levey and Franklyn), 90.

that he could have “carried off any quantity of relics.” While Simpson clarified that while he did not pilfer bodies of relics as they might prove to be “white elephants,” he did take a broken sword and a Prussian eagle.³⁸ While pilfering dead bodies was common, Taylor explained instances of Russian soldiers robbing wounded British soldiers. In a letter dated 11 November 1854, Taylor described Russian soldiers plundering British dead during the Battle of the Heights of Inkermann. Further, the Russians bayoneted and robbed wounded soldiers as well. In one example, Taylor noted a sergeant from the 59th Regiment of Foot who fell wounded and was immediately surrounded by Russians:

they came up, they were seen beside him... his boots, all his good clothing, watch, and chain were gone; a fellow-soldier said he had a gold ring and that he would look for it. He turned him over, raised one hand, but it was not there, he took the other and cried out in disgust – the savage Russians had removed the ring by lopping off and carrying away the finger on which he wore it!³⁹

Thus, as soldiers and civilians had robbed the bodies of troops during the Napoleonic Wars, so this practice continued during the Crimean War. In this regard, the ways soldiers viewed the enemy dead changed very little between the two conflicts as the body was still seen primarily as a source of goods to be exploited and used in the conduct of war.

1.3 Memorials to the Crimean War

Even before the Siege of Sevastopol brought an end to the Crimean War, there were discussions in Britain about the establishment of a monument at Scutari. The first inclination towards the construction of a monument appears in a request dated 20 August

³⁸ A white elephant is an item or possession that the owner cannot dispose of and whose maintenance or costs is out of proportion to its usefulness. Ibid., 246.

³⁹ Arthur Henry Taylor to his parents, 11 November 1845, RAMC/156, Royal Army Medical Corps Archives, Wellcome Library, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b19610439>.

1855, where approximately £50,000 in installments was to be given to Baron Marochette for the erection of a public war monument at Scutari.⁴⁰ Although approval for the monument was granted, debate erupted over the best location for the monument. According to Baron Marochette, the monument was best located in the cemetery in Scutari where British soldiers had been buried. However, some citizens in Great Britain, such as Mr. D. Robinson, a British subject, questioned if foreign soil was appropriate.⁴¹ Despite Robinson's objection and similar issues raised in the British Parliament, the Scutari monument eventually ended up in the centre of the British burial ground at Scutari, according to the suggestion from Major Gordon of the Royal Engineers.⁴²

At virtually the same time as the discussions surrounding a future monument at Scutari, similar discussions were initiated by Stratford de Redcliffe regarding the conservation of burial grounds in the Ottoman Empire. In a letter to the Earl of Clarendon, Stratford de Redcliffe, the ambassador to Constantinople, expressed the need to maintain burial places in Turkey after the cessation of hostilities. Additionally, Redcliffe noted that even after preparing the graves, constant attention would need to be given to the burial grounds as time passed to prevent the graves from falling into disrepair or desecration.⁴³ Redcliffe's asserted the need to maintain the graves, and proposed the establishment of

⁴⁰ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32-5999 – Memorials and Graves: War Memorials, Design, transportation and erection by Baron Marochetti of memorial at Scutari, Crimea to British Army and Navy personnel who fell in war with Russia 1854-1856, Letter from G. Arbuthrot Eagle, 20 August 1855.

⁴¹ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32-5999 – Memorials and Graves: War Memorials, Design, transportation and erection by Baron Marochetti of memorial at Scutari, Crimea to British Army and Navy personnel who fell in war with Russia 1854-1856, H.B. to Lord Panmure, 19 March 1857.

⁴² TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32-5999 – Memorials and Graves: War Memorials, Design, transportation and erection by Baron Marochetti of memorial at Scutari, Crimea to British Army and Navy personnel who fell in war with Russia 1854-1856, Letter: Stratford de Redcliffe to the Earl of Clarendon, 4 May 1857.

⁴³ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 43-1032 – Crimean War cemeteries on the shores of the Bosphorus. Arrangements for their permanent care and conservation, Folder 107-157, Stratford de Redcliffe to the Earl of Clarendon, 4 August 1856.

guardians to care for the graves in Constantinople. Particularly, Redcliffe wanted the guardians to watch over the Scutari graveyard. As such, he proposed that invalided soldiers should be selected to complete the task. Redcliffe further noted that a small annual allowance could be allocated to the invalided soldiers – an amount that was capable of supplying their wants. In addition, he proposed that the military offer the guardians a room in a building within sight of the cemetery. The latter stipulation was due to the fact that no one connected with the British embassy or consulate in Constantinople resided on the cemetery side of the Bosphorus River.⁴⁴

Redcliffe's proposition sparked considerable interest. In a letter to British Member of Parliament Sir Benjamin Hawes, Henry Knight Storks noted that he very much agreed with the proposition, having made a similar one on a recent journey to Constantinople. Additionally, he recommended that the appointed soldier be a respectable married pensioner. Practically, the soldier should be from the Royal Sappers and Miners, since the professional knowledge gained as a sapper would aid the soldier in repairing graves in the cemetery, as well as preventing decay of the graves and monuments.⁴⁵ As for the building the guardian was to inhabit, Storks mentioned a piece of property in the middle of the burial ground that had never been purchased or expropriated. He suggested that the land and house could be purchased for a small sum and then put into good, habitable repair. He also proposed a small parcel be railed off to form a garden for the guardian. Finally, Storks also requested that the surrounding smaller cemeteries, notably to the east, should be brought

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 43-1032 – Crimean War cemeteries on the shores of the Bosphorus. Arrangements for their permanent care and conservation, Folder 107-157, Henry Knight Storks to Benjamin Hawes, 17 October 1856.

into the guardian's jurisdiction.⁴⁶ These suggestions were made while discussions surrounding the final placement of the Scutari monument were ongoing. Ultimately, all of the suggestions were approved in April 1857.

Very little happened during the following twenty years, despite the fact that there was goodwill among British parliamentarians, and despite the intention of the British military to establish maintenance and care of Crimean War graves. During the creation of an Imperial Commission, a proposal to care for soldiers' graves after the First World War was drafted by an unnamed author for the British Parliament. The proposal made specific note of Crimean War graves. Evidently, despite attempts by the British parliament and British Army to care for the graves, nothing was actually done to care for Crimean War graves, aside from a few individual graves. The proposal further noted that the neglect faced by soldiers who sacrificed their lives for Britain weighed heavy on Britain.⁴⁷ The establishment of a guardian to care for the graves and gravesites from the Crimean War appears to be novel for the time. Unlike the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812, British parliamentary and military officials showed a surprising amount of concern for the graves of British soldiers in the Constantinople area. Even though very little came of the attempts to care for graves after the Crimean War, there was still talk among politicians of the need to care for soldiers' graves. As such, attempts to care for graves during the Crimean War can arguably be seen as a major shift in how graves had previously been treated.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Box 1001, Folder WQ 8 Pt 1. Imperial Commission No. 1, Imperial Fund for the Care of Soldiers' Graves – Proposals for Imperial Commission, no date.

⁴⁸ In fact, the British sought to keep track of the status of British graves and cemeteries in Sevastopol. A report was published in 1862, but appears to have been subsequently lost. TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 33-11 – War Office: Reports, Memoranda and Papers (O and A Series), Paper No. 162 – Report on the state of British cemeteries in Sebastopol, pg. 241, Report on the State of British Cemeteries in Sebastopol, 1862.

1.4 The Cardwell Military Reforms and British Society

Following the Crimean War, there were significant questions about the effectiveness of the British Army. Issues ranged from the supply system to recruitment of soldiers. During the campaign, soldiers were ill-prepared for the conflict, underfed, underhoused, and cold. The most significant issue of all was the fact that Britain was unable to recruit enough soldiers in the field and was forced to return to the practice of previous centuries whereby they recruit foreign irregulars to fight instead. Mishaps, such as the charge of the Light Brigade, came to symbolize the overarching problems with the British Army.⁴⁹ Compounding the issues was the fact that by the time of the Crimean War, there had been advances in printing technology, which facilitated a rapid increase in the availability of print media and allowed for greater circulation of reports – particularly those detailing the inadequacies of the British military. The Indian Mutiny of 1857 underscored the same inadequacies again, and again the printing press allowed for a greater circulation of British military inadequacies and military disaster.⁵⁰

For instance, Britain resisted the shift away from irregulars even as late as the 1870s. Irregulars could protect British assets overseas and would typically not draw the attention of the British public. However, during the Crimean War, Britain was forced to recruit irregulars into its ranks due to a shortage of recruits. After the War, there was an increased push by British parliamentarians to abolish the use of irregulars and enhance

⁴⁹ The Charge of the Light Brigade was a British cavalry charge led by Lord Cardigan against Russian forces at the Battle of Balaclava during the Crimean War. The charge was a result of poor British communication, which resulted in a frontal charge against an artillery battery. The brigade was forced to retreat with no gains and had one of the highest amount of British casualties from the Crimean War.

⁵⁰ Deborah Avant, "From Mercenary to Citizen Armies: Explaining Change in the Practice of War," *International Organization*, 54 no. 1 (2000), 41-72. doi:10.1162/002081800551118, 64

policies that made it difficult to recruit irregulars. The reasoning behind a distaste for irregulars was the categorical failure of using foreign soldiers in the British Army. Yet, eliminating the use of irregulars led to an increased need for military reform in Britain.⁵¹ Furthermore, there was an intense scrutiny by the British parliament on the British Army after the Crimean War. Two Royal Commissions were launched, one exploring the health of the British Army (1856-57), which was launched as a result of Florence Nightingale's reports on medical care during the Crimean War. The second, more important commission was a Royal Commission on the Defence of the United Kingdom (1859), which deemed the defence of Britain as inadequate.

Historian David French also explains that there were problems with the type of person drawn into the army throughout the 1860s. He noted that recruiting typically drew the dregs of society, who were characteristically drawn to the army due to a mixture of financial bounties, drink, and unrealistic views of army life. Recruiting was such a problem that serving officers began to worry that the recruits they did receive either did not have the physical strength to complete training, or the mental discipline for the army. In addition to the recruiting problem in Britain was the fact that working-class British men were only willing to fight for Britain by joining the volunteer battalions when needed, but were unwilling to join the regulars forces in peace time.⁵²

Further social problems persisted. For example, the upper class in Britain could purchase their first commission, then purchase each promotion afterwards up to Lieutenant-Colonel, creating an environment that "attracted the lazy and gave little

⁵¹ Sarah Percy, *Mercenaries: The History of a Norm in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 163-164.

⁵² David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People C. 1870-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 12.

incentive to the able.” Regular and auxiliary officers were concerned with the lack of institutional links between parts of Britain and the army, desiring a closer connection between a regiment and a geographic area. The model had been proven by recent Prussian successes in 1864, 1866, and 1870.⁵³

Cardwell instituted multiple sweeping changes of the British military starting in 1870. Two key acts were introduced. The *Army Enlistment Act* (1870) replaced the twelve years of regular service with six years of regular service followed by six years with the reserves. The intent was to provide a steady stream of reserve troops to draw upon should Britain enter war again. The *Localisation Act* (1873) saw infantry battalions affiliated in pairs and assigned to different regions of Britain. Through the *Localisation Act*, Britain was broken up into sixty-six brigade district areas. Each area had two infantry battalions with the intent to have one serving abroad and the other training at home. Each battalion was assigned to a brigade area for the purposes of recruiting and training.⁵⁴

The British parliament hoped that the *Localisation Act* would improve morale and discipline in those units. David French points out that in 1842, a British Officer, Sir J. E. Alexander, noted that discipline in units that recruited from the same part of the country that housed them tended to be better and aided in forming better units than ones that took any willing man. This, too, was observed by the British military of the Prussian Army in 1870.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Brian Bond, “The Effect of the Cardwell Reforms in Army Organization 1874-1904,” *Journal of the Royal United Service Institute* 105 (Nov 1960): 515, accessed July 16, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.1080/03071846009421142>, 515-516.

⁵⁵ French, *Military Identities*, 14.

Along with the *Enlistment Act* and the *Localisation Act*, Cardwell also brought forth legislation to reorganise the administration of the army. Here, the separate administration of reserves and volunteers were abolished and a central authority under the War Office was established. The act also subordinated the Commander-in-Chief of the Forces to the Secretary of State for War, thus removing royal influence over the military and giving authority to parliament.⁵⁶

Royal patronage over the military had previously been a problem. The Commander-in-Chief of the Forces, the Duke of Cambridge, sat in the House of Lords, but not in the Cabinet. He had been in the position since 1856, and remained in it until 1895, and he held his own views on the organisation of the military. Finally, the Duke was the first cousin of the Queen, which allowed the Crown to continue to influence the army.⁵⁷ This resulted in, as historian Albert Tucker posits, “the strong social cast to his military judgement influenc[ing] most high appointments and extend[ing] to the staff work of senior officers about him.”⁵⁸

While problems with the army came to the forefront in the 1860s and 1870s, a growing uncertainty about the Christian faith also began to take hold in Britain into the late Victorian era. The uncertainty was a result of new views on disease and the ability to attribute death to a specific disease instead of divine intervention. Patricia Jalland suggested that between 1830 and 1920, there were two significant changes in the history of death in Britain. The first took place in the decades after 1870 because of a mixture of

⁵⁶ Albert V. Tucker, “Army and Society in England 1870-1900: A Reassessment of the Cardwell Reforms,” *Journal of British Studies* 2 (May 1963): pp. 110-141, accessed July 16, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/175254>, 112.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

factors, including the gradual change of demographics, religious decline, and medical advances. The second occurred after the First World War.⁵⁹

The mixture of social advances and military reforms also impacted the view of how a soldier's body should be treated. Through Cardwell's attempts to establishment a more professional army, the image of British soldier was raised from a questionable character to a man of quality.⁶⁰ The image of a military man in Britain was improved upon from that of dubious company as a result of the *Localisation Act*, not only was the image of a military man improved from being of dubious company. Moreover, one could argue a sense of connection formed between soldiers as a result of the same act. Localisation grounded regiments in a certain location or district in Britain and recruitment was done from these areas. Thus, there was an increased likelihood that soldiers in regiments might have known one another before they joined. Further, they would have a connection with the location through relatives or friends. Finally, with the significant decrease, and eventual abolishment, of irregulars, there was an increased connection between the British civilian and a British military man. As such, old practices such as collecting bones to be ground up into bone-meal would have been frowned upon.

The Cardwell reforms occurred during a time of significant medical advancement. Already death was being attributed to disease due to better identification of diseased and improved hygiene. As a result, people, and soldiers were beginning to live longer. Instead

⁵⁹ Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6.

⁶⁰ Edward Peter Joshua Gosling, "Tommy Atkins, War Office Reform and the Social and Cultural Presence of the Late-Victorian Army in Britain, c.1868-1899" (PhD diss, Plymouth University, 2015): <https://pearl.plymouth.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/10026.1/4359/2016gosling10300558phd.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>, 47-49.

of a soldier's young death being seen as the norm, it was seen as a tragic – as a person's death in their twenties was still commonplace around the time of the Napoleonic Wars.

1.5 The Late Victorian Era – The Zulu Wars and British Burials

By the time of the Zulu War (1879), British burial practices on the warfront had begun to change again. Soldiers began to pay more attention to how their comrades were buried. Furthermore, the sense of wanting to bury one's own dead was also evident during the conflict. This new sentiment towards burials became evident enough to be captured in documents of the 24th Regiment.

In his book *The Redcoat and Religion*, historian Michael Snape described the actions that Lieutenant-Colonel Evelyn Wood took to ensure the burials of soldiers during the Zulu Wars. For instance, Wood ordered a bugler to retrieve a Book of Common Prayer from the saddle on a dead horse to ensure that two soldiers could be given a proper burial. This was done during the Battle of Hlobane in March 1879 while under enemy fire. Part of the reason behind the dedication to burying soldiers likely related to the horrors that befell the bodies of British soldiers killed by Zulu warriors, for such bodies were typically stabbed, disembowelled, and mutilated.⁶¹

Snape also detailed an expedition that was launched into Zululand to bury the remains of those who died at the Battle of Isandlwana.⁶² This was confirmed by a confidential memo dated 18 May 1879 from Major-General Edward Newdigate of the 24th Regiment, which noted anxiety among the men to take part in the ceremony of burying the

⁶¹ Michael Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion: The Forgotten History of the British Soldier from the Age of Marlborough to the Eve of the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2005), 211.

⁶² Ibid.

dead who had fallen at Isandlwana. Similar sentiments were expressed by the Natal Carbineers. Evidently, the sentiment in both regiments was strong enough that Newdigate decided to cancel his memo from the previous day,⁶³ which had ordered the 24th Regiment to carry a sufficient number of spades and picks, and to have accompanying pack horses in order to search for, and bury, the remains of both comrades and other men lying near Isandlwana.⁶⁴

Evidently, both Newdigate and Field Marshal Major-General Lord Chelmsford continued to have problems burying their dead. Lord Chelmsford noted that he buried the bodies of fallen soldiers near the battlefield of Isandlwana. Chelmsford explained that he buried all bodies not distinguished from the 24th Regiment, which had requested to bury their own dead. When burying these soldiers, Chelmsford was attempting to honour the 24th Regiment's request to bury their own.⁶⁵ However, the task was difficult since not all bodies could be distinguished from the 24th Regiment – a sign that fighting was particularly fierce.

On 22 May 1879, Newdigate recorded that Zulu warriors had interfered with the investigation of the countryside. Moreover, he noted that the religious ceremony of burying fallen comrades could be postponed until a time when the enemy was not harassing his forces. However, he also explained that a last mark of respect should still take place. He

⁶³ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/7741 – Zulu War: Dispatches relating to reconnaissance operations and preparations for advance; burial of dead at Isandhlwana, Major-General Edward Newdigate to Field Marshall Lieutenant-General Lord Chelmsford, 17 May 1879.

⁶⁴ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/7741 – Zulu War: Dispatches relating to reconnaissance operations and preparations for advance; burial of dead at Isandhlwana, Major-General Edward Newdigate to Field Marshall Lieutenant-General Lord Chelmsford (confidential), 18 May 1879.

⁶⁵ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/7741 – Zulu War: Dispatches relating to reconnaissance operations and preparations for advance; burial of dead at Isandhlwana, Field Marshall Lieutenant-General Lord Chelmsford to Major-General E. Newdigate, 21 May 1879.

further clarified that covering the remains of the gallantly fallen soldiers could be one way to respect the dead until a formal burial could take place.⁶⁶

Burials during the Zulu War show a stark contrast to those at the start of the nineteenth century. Whereas in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, newspapers described bodies and bones being used as bone-meal for farming, during the Zulu War the military's focus was on ensuring that a soldier's sacrifice was honoured. Moreover, soldiers themselves began to express their desire to bury their own dead, a show of strong comradeship amongst soldiers. Despite this, the sentiments from the latter half of the nineteenth century are still a far cry from the first half of the nineteenth century, denoting a marked shift in perceptions on burials.

1.6 The Boer War – First Attempts at Marking Graves

During the Second Boer War, the introduction of guerrilla tactics ultimately changed the style of warfare heading into the twentieth century. So too, the way in which burials were conducted during war saw a marked change. Boer War burials were also captured in famous literature. For example, Thomas Hardy wrote the poem *Drummer Hodge*, which depicted the corpse Drummer Hodge being laid to rest in a mass grave.

One example of change concerns the expropriation of land. In September 1901, Natal governor Henry McCallum passed an act expropriating land for the sole purpose of creating burial grounds for use by Imperial and Colonial forces and for forces belonging to the late Orange Free State and South African Republic. Though the expropriation of land

⁶⁶ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/7741 – Zulu War: Dispatches relating to reconnaissance operations and preparations for advance; burial of dead at Isandhlwana, Major-General E. Newdigate to Field Marshall Lieutenant-General Lord Chelmsford, 22 May 1879.

for burials was not new – the British had expropriated land in Egypt, Canada, and Sri Lanka – the formality involved in the expropriation of land was. In Trincomalee, Sri Lanka, the British were forced to go through old records from when they absorbed the previous Dutch colony to find out how they had acquired the cemetery.⁶⁷ In Canada, areas of land were used when the need existed, as was the case with burials during the construction of the Rideau Canal. Canada also received direct control over some former military cemeteries; such was the case in Toronto when the cemetery in Garrison Common, west of Fort York, which was used in 1861 and 1862 and handed over to the Dominion Government in 1870.⁶⁸ Although it had previously been common practice, the expropriation of land in South Africa as part of a coherent, formal program was definitive proof of caring for the burial of soldiers.

Typically, the formal acquisition of land meant the War Office or Colonial Office provided the funds to maintain the cemeteries.⁶⁹ However, the bureaucratic process in some cases led to either the War Office or the Colonial Office not providing funds for certain cemeteries since the two offices argued over ownership of the cemeteries. These cemeteries fell into disrepair due to military funds being withdrawn and civilian funds – acquired

⁶⁷ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 33/55 – War Office: Reports, Memoranda and Papers (O and A Series), Paper No. A.373, pg. 1179-1185, Correspondence Relating to the Maintenance of the Cemetery at Trincomalee, 1895.

⁶⁸ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 396/89. Military cemeteries (United Kingdom and overseas), Canada – List of grave yard and burial places with reference to Directive of Works memo dated 16th September 1890, 2 December 1890.

⁶⁹ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/6407 – Request from Egyptian Army for funds to repair British cemeteries at Assouan and Wady Halfa, Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on British Cemeteries Abroad, 2 July 1889.

through burial fees – being unavailable. One example of this situation was Trincomalee in Sri Lanka, where the cemetery fell into a deplorable state.⁷⁰

Furthermore, the act outlined the legal obligations for transferring the land. First, any land where British, Colonial, or South African forces were buried could be expropriated if deemed necessary by the British military. All lands expropriated were required to include an accessible entrance, or include a right-of-way for agents of the government to access the land. Finally, the act laid out the compensation requirements for the land as well as penalties for contravening the regulations.⁷¹

Further to the act of expropriation, instructions as to the care of soldiers' graves in the Transvaal were released by the military after the end of the war. The instructions explained that the military would take charge of cemeteries and soldiers' graves in South Africa, specifically noting Pretoria, Middelburg, Barberton, Standerton, and Potchefstroom. In addition, the military would also care for graves within a five-mile radius of the listed towns.⁷² The civil government was responsible for the care of graves in all other parts of the Transvaal. Care of some aspects of soldiers' graves was entrusted to the Royal Engineers. For example, they were tasked with erecting crosses supplied to them for soldiers' graves. In cases where a cross had not been supplied, the engineers would erect

⁷⁰ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 33/55 – War Office: Reports, Memoranda and Papers (O and A Series), Paper No. A.373, pg. 1179-1185, Correspondence Relating to the Maintenance of the Cemetery at Trincomalee, 1895.

⁷¹ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/6023. Memorials and Graves: Graves: Maintenance of Military Grave-yards of Colonial and Imperial forces in South African and Canada; Natal Act No. 19, 1901 relates, enclosed, Act: To Provide for the Expropriation of Land for the purpose of Burial Grounds for certain of the Imperial and Colonial forces, and certain of the Forces belonging to the late Orange Free State and South African Republic, who have died either from wounds or otherwise during the recent campaign in South Africa, September 1901.

⁷² TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3798 – Sanction of payment to the Guild of Loyal Women in South Africa of the cost of crosses put on Graves of Soldiers, Instructions as to the care of Soldiers' Graves in the Transvaal, 24 August 1903.

an iron cross over the grave of the soldier. These were to be paid for out of military funds, costing a maximum of 10 pounds sterling per grave. Although the Royal Engineers were tasked with caring for some graves, the bulk of the identification and marking work was carried out by the Guild of Loyal Women,⁷³ which began its work during the Boer War. The civil governments in South Africa had been unable to take over the tasks due to the continuing war, so the Guild focused on identifying, marking, and preserving the graves of fallen soldiers during the war itself.⁷⁴ Although the Guild took on identifying graves during the war, the majority of the work was completed after the war ended.

Unfortunately, very little records and memoirs detail how soldiers were buried during the Boer War and most are Boer accounts of British burials. General Ben Viljoen, a Boer soldier, explained in his memoirs that British dead near the Eland River so considerable enough that it was difficult to find them all. A few weeks after the skirmish, General Viljoen returned to the scene and found some bodies left unburied from the battle. He explained that upon finding “some bodies lying about the bush ... [we] gave them [a] decent burial.”⁷⁵ In another passage, Viljoen noted a Major who expressed sympathy for fallen Boer soldiers at Lydenburg and “made provisions for the decent burial.”⁷⁶

In another source from former British Member of Parliament and Poet, Michael Davitt, detailed Boers aiding English with burials during the Battle of Magersfontein. In one instance, General Pieter Arnoldus Cronje offered “50 burghers to help bury [the British] dead.” However, as the Boers aided the British soldiers the next day, British naval

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3797 – Appointment of a Local Committee on the care of Military Graves in Cape Colony, Time Article: South African Graves Fund, 2 November 1905.

⁷⁵ Ben Viljoen, *My Reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War* (London: Hood, Douglas, & Howard, 1902), 419.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 459.

guns in Lord Paul Sanford Methuen's camp opened fired on the Boer and British soldiers forcing the chaplains to ride back to camp and order the firing stopped.⁷⁷

Davitt also described how the British dead were very badly buried. He noted communications between General Cronje and Lord Methuen, where Cronje explained that the British work had been hastily completed. The result was that "limbs were protruding from the too shallow pits in which the bodies had been interred." Further, according to Davitt, the second burial party sent out by Lord Methuen was intoxicated. As Davitt explained "drink was ... deemed to be necessary for the burying party, owing to the rapid decomposition of the bodies after lying some days in the broiling sun. Some of the Tommies jumped on the covering of the pits so as to press down the bulging carcasses of the dead. A horrible and sickening scene."⁷⁸ Davitt also explained a conversation between himself and General Louis Botha where Botha explained delays in burying the British dead:

Again, there was an unaccountable delay in the burying of the English dead, as at Colenso. Several hundred men lay unburied at the top of the hill, in very hot weather, too, for three of four days. I have granted an armistice of twenty-four hours to General Warren for the purposes of attending to the wounded and of burying the dead, but it looked by the delay which occurred as if he were more anxious to march his big force back across the Tugela than to attend to the duties for which the armistice had been agreed to by me.⁷⁹

Another example is described by Boer soldier Deneys Reitz, who explained helping British with their burials in his memoirs. After General Redvers Buller's second attempt to take Tugela, the Boers spent time aiding "English Red Cross doctors and bearer parties that came up to bury their dead and carry away their wounded."⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Michael Davitt, *The Boer Fight for Freedom* (New York: Funk & Wagnalis Company, 1902), 223.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 353.

⁸⁰ Deneys Reitz, *Commando: A Boer Journal of the Boer War* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1929), 82.

1.7 Post-Boer War Burial Process – Practices and Clean-up

Most burial identification and marking for graves created during the Boer War occurred following the conflict. The same was true for creating most of the permanent cemeteries in South Africa. In January 1903, Viscount Alfred Milner released a document outlining prospective burial practices and ways to increase the efficiency of burials. Milner noted that a list of the graves of British soldiers who died of wounds during the conflict had been compiled by the Director of Public Works in collaboration with the Royal Engineers. However, this list only dealt with soldiers who died from wounds or disease while in the Transvaal and did not include those who were killed in action. Milner noted that some graves created toward the end of hostilities were not included. He concluded that there was a sufficient number on the list to show where most graves were situated and that the proper action could be taken for setting apart plots of ground for cemeteries.⁸¹ Milner explained that a list of those who were killed in action had not been compiled. However, he stated that the General Officer Commanding of the British forces could order the preparation of such a list. Milner noted that the principal problem was the question of outlying and isolated graves, and whether such graves should be exhumed and the remains brought into cemeteries. Milner's proposal was that larger cemeteries should be fenced in, while isolated graves or smaller gravesites should be marked with a cairn of stones and a central stone slab. The central stone slab would have each soldier's name etched into it. Milner wrote that the military, under Lieutenant-General Sir Neville Lyttelton, concurred with his proposal. As such, Milner issued orders for it to be acted upon.⁸²

⁸¹ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/6023 – Memorials and Graves: Graves: Maintenance of military grave-yards of Colonial and Imperial Forces in South Africa and Canada; Natal Act No. 19, 1901 relates, enclosed, Number 32 – Lord Milner, 19 January 1903.

⁸² Ibid.

Throughout 1904 and into 1905, work on compiling registers of those killed during the conflict had been completed and cemetery work had transitioned to consolidating graves and ensuring they were properly marked and cared for. In March 1905, Milner sent a dispatch to Alfred Lyttelton, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, outlining the grave and burial work in South Africa. Milner explained that in the case of the Transvaal, the collection of graves and establishment of cemeteries had been completed. He further noted that all of the graves of men who had records had been traced. Milner stated that some graves without existing records had been positively identified throughout the burial process.⁸³

Milner detailed the progress by the Public Works Department to complete burials.⁸⁴ He noted that it was the general belief amongst British officials that the work was best left to one body to avoid inconsistencies or inefficiencies in the burial of soldiers. Furthermore, Milner noted the overall principle that was adopted in regards to forming a cemetery. In cases where there were six or more men buried in a single location, a cemetery was to be formed, and the authority to do so would be given by the Central Office.⁸⁵ However, if there were fewer than six men buried in a location and there was no prospect of increasing the number buried there, or bringing in outlying graves, then the graves were moved to the nearest cemetery. All cemeteries – Milner noted there were 120 – were to be accessible to

⁸³ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3797 – Appointment of a Local Committee on the care of Military Graves in Cape Colony, Alfred Milner to Alfred Lyttelton, Colonial Secretary, 20 March 1905.

⁸⁴ Though Milner notes that the Public Works Department completed the work in its entirety, Captain R.E. Harvey, Secretary of the Public Works Department, only noted the work as having been completed by his department in the Transvaal region. Harvey notes that he was unsure of what had been done in the other three South African colonies.

TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3797 – Appointment of a Local Committee on the care of Military Graves in Cape Colony, Time Article: South African Graves Fund, 2 November 1905.

⁸⁵ Milner only refers to the organization as the Central Office. However, the likely British agency that he is referring to is the British Central Office of Information.

all visitors. Finally, an alphabetical register, listing all relevant and available details was to be kept at the Central Office, along with the plans for each cemetery.⁸⁶

Although work in the Transvaal had largely been successful, work in the other colonies of South Africa had not begun as effectively. Burials in Orange River Colony had not been completed by March 1905. Milner predicted that the work would be completed in six months. As for Natal and Cape Colony, Milner had no official report when he dispatched an update to Alfred Lyttelton, but stated his belief that work had commenced in the two areas and should be completed by the end of 1905.⁸⁷

1.8 A South African Graves Fund for the Care of Graves and Cemeteries

In July 1904, Alfred Milner sent a letter to Alfred Lyttelton requesting information on the South African Graves Committee, which had recently met in London. Milner knew nothing of the committee and was requesting additional information to ascertain if it related to a scheme he had been considering for South Africa. Milner added that his scheme consisted of approaching the governments of the various South African states to request a single contribution to a common fund. The fund would be used to form a permanent endowment for the preservation of military graves in South Africa. Moreover, a portion of the funds could also be diverted to the Guild of Loyal Women in each state, to continue the work of marking and registering the locations of graves throughout South Africa.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ The exception to this rule were the larger military cemeteries at Pretoria, Standerton, Middelburg, Barberton, Potchefstroom, and Johannesburg.

TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3797. Appointment of a Local Committee on the care of Military Graves in Cape Colony, Alfred Milner to Alfred Lyttelton, Colonial Secretary, 20 March 1905.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3794 – As to Composition of S. African Graves Fund Committee, Lord Milner, High Commissioner of South Africa to Alfred Lyttelton, British MP, Colonial Office, 8 July 1904.

Milner's scheme consisted of having the South African governments make a substantial donation to the fund in the first year, to form the nucleus of the fund for future years. After the fund began to gain money, Milner hoped that the War Office and others would be enticed to contribute. However, Milner also believed that the base cost for work would be a minimum of £50,000. As such, he believed that the fund should start with at least half the minimum requirement.⁸⁹ In making the recommendations for his scheme, Milner noted the difficulty in completing grave and cemetery work in South Africa. For instance, he noted that there were many agencies carrying out the same work, which caused uncertainty over who was responsible for what aspects of the work. Furthermore, there was considerable overlap in the work being completed, leading to inefficiencies and neglect in the work.⁹⁰ Milner was referring to the Guild of Loyal Women, the military authorities, and the Victoria League, which was an offshoot of the Guild of Loyal Women. He believed that all grave work should be consolidated into one central organization, so that inefficiencies and neglect could cease.⁹¹

The underlying reason for Milner's desire to create a fund was his belief that it was unsatisfactory to leave the care of soldiers' graves solely to private charity organizations. In a letter to Major-General E.S. Brook, Administrator of Cape Colony, Sir Henry Edward McCallum, Governor of Natal, and the Lieutenant-Governor of Pretoria, Milner explained that although the Guild of Loyal Women was devoted to its work in concentrating and marking soldiers' graves, the work needed to be a national obligation. By assigning a

⁸⁹ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3797 – Appointment of a Local Committee on the care of Military Graves in Cape Colony, Alfred Milner to E.S. Brook, H.E. and H.E., 10 February 1905.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3796 – Maintenance of Soldiers' Graves in Cape Colony, "Care of soldiers' graves in South Africa," 25 October 1904.

national obligation to burials, more resources could be allocated to complete the task than if it were to remain allotted to a private organization. As such, Milner submitted his scheme to create an annual income fund for the care of soldiers' graves.⁹²

Milner's desire to establish a scheme for a South African Graves Fund was shared by other officials and civilians in South Africa. H. Goold-Adams, Lieutenant Governor of the Orange River Colony, displayed similar feelings towards a fund to be used for the upkeep and marking of soldiers' graves in December 1904. Following an Executive Council meeting, Goold-Adams sent a letter to Alfred Milner emphasising the need for an inter-colonial trust fund. Goold-Adams believed that the fund should be used for both British and Boer soldiers who perished during the conflict and for Boers who had died while interned in concentration camps.⁹³

In pushing his case, Goold-Adams noted the example of British cemeteries in Scutari after the Crimean War. He explained that unsatisfactory conditions were a direct result of a lack of proper funds.⁹⁴ In drawing these parallels between South Africa and Crimea, Goold-Adams suggested that if South Africa wanted to honour all war dead properly, then it needed to create a fund to which all South African colonies could contribute. Further to colonial funds, Goold-Adams believed that the British War Office

⁹² TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3797 – Appointment of a Local Committee on the care of Military Graves in Cape Colony, Alfred Milner to E.S. Brook, H.E. and H.E, 10 February 1905.

⁹³ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3797 – Appointment of a Local Committee on the care of Military Graves in Cape Colony, H. Goold-Adams to The High Commissioner of South Africa, 22 December 1904.

⁹⁴ However, the rise of the 'cemetery' and military cemeteries did not begin until the 1840s according to Julie Rugg and Marilyn Yalom. In fact, the word cemetery was not used before the nineteenth century and was created from the Greek word Koimeterium.

Julie Rugg, "The Origins and Progress of Cemetery Establishment in Britain," in *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal*, ed. Peter C. Jupp and Glennys Howarth, (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1997), 105-112, Marilyn Yalom, *The American Resting Place: Four Hundred Years of History Through our Cemeteries and Burial Grounds* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008), xi-xii.

could be asked to supplement the funds since most military cemeteries in South Africa had predominantly British soldiers' graves. He believed that private citizens and families of those who fought and died in the conflict might also provide private donations.⁹⁵

It is interesting to note that Goold-Adams' scheme did deviate from Milner's thoughts regarding a central fund for burials. Milner had not considered the question of concentration camp graves, which was a point of contention in South Africa at the time. However, Goold-Adams intended to include re-burial and marking of concentration camp graves to honour South African civilians. However, Milner opposed including this type of commemoration in any scheme. Although he conceded that the idea was noble, he feared it could derail any attempts to get a scheme honouring British soldiers. He later explained that the chances of gaining a permanent fund for burials was already quite small by March 1905, and that the focus should be on gaining the sympathies of soldiers to honour their fallen comrades, instead of alienating such sympathies by including the graves of Boers under a central fund.⁹⁶

Milner's fears were not unfounded. The question of who was to pay for burials, graves, and cemetery upkeep was already contentious in Britain even before the Boer War. In 1889, British officials released a report outlining the responsibilities for cemeteries in British colonies. The general belief was that smaller cemeteries and scattered or isolated burials should be either consolidated or concentrated into larger burial grounds, similar to the concentration of burials after the Crimean War. The stated reasoning was to reduce maintenance expenses. Furthermore, British officials believed that any reduction in

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3797 – Appointment of a Local Committee on the care of Military Graves in Cape Colony, Alfred Milner to Alfred Lyttelton, Colonial Secretary, 20 March 1905.

expenses could entice local authorities to take over maintaining graves.⁹⁷ However, later discussions shifted away from active cemeteries and towards who was to pay for disused British military cemeteries in the colonies. British officials opted to pass the cost to colonial officials. By 1905, the general rule was that colonial officials were left to care for the graves, both ensuring the maintenance and covering the costs. Furthermore, British letters concerning Boer War cemeteries from July 1901 specifically delegated the care of military cemeteries in the Cape Colony, Natal, Transvaal, and Orange River Colony to colonial authorities.⁹⁸

There were also objections to the schemes to set up a fund to care for graves in South Africa. High Commissioner Arthur Lawley submitted his concerns to Alfred Lyttelton, explaining that upon review in the various colonies in South Africa, he did not see a justification for the scheme in its original form. Lawley deemed the work in the Transvaal to be a simple matter that did not require a fund or committee to undertake or the amount of money proposed by Alfred Milner. He posited that £600 a year would be sufficient for the Transvaal, while Natal would only require £450 a year. Lawley stated that there were strong feelings among the colonies to retain the care of graves locally instead of divesting it to a central organization. Lawley's objection was to the original lump sum being set aside, not to the idea of having a fund for placing and repairing graves. He instead suggested that a trust fund be set up after the graves and cemeteries had been put in order and once the scope of the costs could be accurately determined.⁹⁹ Despite Lawley's

⁹⁷ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/6407. Request from Egyptian Army for funds to repair British cemeteries at Assouan and Wady Halfa, Report of Inter Departmental Committee on British Cemeteries Abroad, 1890, 2 July 1889.

⁹⁸ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3797 – Appointment of a Local Committee on the care of Military Graves in Cape Colony, Memorandum: Preservation of South African Graves, 9 May 1905.

⁹⁹ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3797 – Appointment of a Local Committee on the care of Military Graves in Cape Colony, Arthur Lawley to Alfred Lyttelton, 15 May 1905.

objection to Milner's Scheme in its original form, Alfred Lyttelton had already approved it.

Additional objections came from the British War Office. Many of the proposed schemes included funding from the War Office, however, officials there refused to provide funding for any scheme. Instead, they suggested that the colonies and the Colonial Office should undertake the work and cost of maintaining graves. Furthermore, War Office officials also felt that any capital contributions to an Imperial fund should be borne from civil funds, the same funds that paid for diplomatic and consular buildings.¹⁰⁰ These were the same funds used in previous cases, such as the graves and cemeteries from the Crimean War.

Despite enthusiasm for the Milner scheme, little had been accomplished by September 1906. The main reason for this was that officials in South Africa felt that graves needed to be marked before a grave fund could be set up. As a result, South African officials decided to issue a public appeal for funds. They intended for Lord Milner to sign the appeal and hoped that both Princess Helena (Princess Christian of Schleswig-Holstein) and Lord Roberts would also sign it.¹⁰¹ Although progress was lacking on the Milner assistance fund, money was being still being collected from numerous British colonies including Canada, South Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, and South Africa through the Guild of Loyal Women and the Victoria League.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ TNA, War Office Fonds Box WO 32/3798 – Sanction of payment to the Guild of Loyal Women in South Africa of the cost of crosses put on Graves of Soldiers, Memorandum for P.U.S. No. 82. Graves in South Africa, 11 July 1906.

¹⁰¹ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3799 – Funds for the Maintenance of soldiers graves in South Africa: suggestions of an appeal to the Army, Annie Lawley to Colonel Scott Kerr, 11 September [1906].

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

While Lord Milner was working to achieve his scheme for a South African Graves Fund, the Victoria League was also working to collect money for the upkeep of British soldiers' graves in South Africa. Furthermore, money from the South African governments also went to the league's fund. As early as 1905, the assistance funds were being transferred to South Africa through the Victoria League. This was done through collections typically by the League while in Britain, though it also consisted of direct contributions from colonies such as Tasmania. Financial statements stipulated that some of this money was solely for locating and setting in order of graves, and a portion was set aside for maintenance.¹⁰³

By 1908, the sole grave fund was the one established by the Victoria League and the Guild of Loyal Women. By then, it was known as the Maintenance of Graves Trust Fund. Money was used by the fund to pay for iron crosses, fencing off cemeteries, and repairing individual graves. Furthermore, although the military aided the Guild of Loyal Women in repairing and improving graves on occasion, it had not made any direct cash payment to an upkeep fund for the individual graves. Instead, the British military focused its attention on military cemeteries.¹⁰⁴ This was in the form of completing and covering the cost of maintenance to the cemeteries. Soldiers did make individual payments to the trust fund, but not as representatives of the British Army.¹⁰⁵

Although there was a real possibility of the garrisons pulling out of South Africa following the war, there was a general belief that the trust fund set up by the Guild of Loyal

¹⁰³ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3799 – Funds for the Maintenance of soldiers graves in South Africa: suggestions of an appeal to the Army, Statement to Correspondence from Lieutenant-General John French to the Secretary, War Office, 1 October 1906.

¹⁰⁴ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3802 – Payment for crosses on soldiers graves in South Africa, M. Anderson to Under-Secretary of State [J.E.B. Seely], 4 May 1908.

¹⁰⁵ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3799 – Funds for the Maintenance of soldiers graves in South Africa: suggestions of an appeal to the Army, Annie Lawley to Colonel Scott Kerr, 11 September [1906].

Women would be able to cover the costs of cemetery upkeep. The trust was still receiving funding from the South African governments and had made investments to ensure that graves could be maintained in perpetuity.¹⁰⁶ In fact, in addition to the funds that the South African governments had given the Guild of Loyal Women, the Victoria League was still collecting funds in England to be dispersed to the different guild establishments throughout the South African colonies. Moreover, the Orange River Colony had not needed to draw on any external funding by May 1908 and had paid for upkeep costs with its own funds.¹⁰⁷

1.9 Post-War Burial Problems

Despite Milner's optimistic outlook, there were many problems with how burials were conducted both during the Boer War and afterwards. Examples of this were the burials conducted at the Rooikopjes farm, where bodies were, at various times, obscured by or exposed by shifting sands. Adding to the problem was that the British military, according to C. R. Chalmers, a Civil Commissioner for the area, refused to remove the bodies of soldiers buried in the district.¹⁰⁸

In Chalmers' opinion, the removal of those soldiers to a central place would accomplish much more than leaving them near Kheis, where they fell. Chalmers posited that "before long, there [would] be no traces of these graves." Moreover, he noted that the bodies of other men buried in the district were only a couple of feet below the soil, resulting in jackals frequently digging up the bodies. Finally, Chalmers concluded that the problems

¹⁰⁶ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3802 – Payment for crosses on soldiers graves in South Africa, M. Anderson to Under-Secretary of State [J.E.B. Seely], 4 May 1908.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3792 – The Interment of Remains of Soldiers Buried in Griqualand (Hay) District), Survey and Expropriation of grave sites under Act No. 15 of 1900, 23 November 1903.

in the Kheis district could be remedied by removing the bodies to Griquatown Cemetery, something that the army had, until then, refused to do. However, by the time of Chalmers' letter, public opinion had shifted toward the belief that the work should be completed at the earliest possible time.¹⁰⁹ In the end, Chalmers' letter was forwarded to the Under Secretary for Agriculture by Max Jurisch, the Surveyor-General, on 9 December 1903. Jurisch believed that the letter should be sent to the Imperial military authorities with an attached view that all bodies within the Division of Hay should be removed either to the nearest, most convenient cemetery, or re-interred in a more suitable area.¹¹⁰ Any new, suitable location would be characterized by appropriate geography and geology, be dug to an appropriate depth, and have markings that would stand up to a desert environment. Approval for the remains to be removed to Griquatown Cemetery was finally granted by the end June 1904. However, the British Army Council still held the belief that remains should not be disinterred and moved. In a correspondence from November 1904, the Colonial Secretary for Cape Colony advised of his stance on the removal of remains: it should only take place when it was necessary, and after consent from relatives had been received and noted for a particular soldier.¹¹¹

A letter from Georgina Frere to Colonel C. V. Crews, military representative in South Africa, outlined concerns of the Victoria League regarding burials. The Victoria League began working with the Guild of Loyal Women after the end of the Boer War to ensure that soldiers' graves were properly cared for. Its work was born out of a desire to

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3792 – The Interment of Remains of Soldiers Buried in Griqualand (Hay) District), Extract: Survey and Expropriation of Grave Sites under Act 14 of 1900, 9 December 1903.

¹¹¹ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3795 – Maintenance of Soldiers' Graves in Cape Colony, R.H. Brade, Assistant to the Secretary of the War Office to Colonial Secretary, Cape Colony, 22 November 1904.

help the Guild of Loyal Women secure the required money for its graves fund. Frere noted continued resistance from the British War Office in allowing soldiers' bodies to be removed to suitable locations. She wrote that burials typically took place hastily during stressful times, which resulted in some graves that improperly honoured soldiers; these included burial grounds that were in swamps during part of the war, graves that were on a cart path, inaccessible graves, and graves near farmland and farmhouses. Moreover, Frere noted that some of these cases could lead to grave desecration by Boers.¹¹²

Frere also noted the difficulty experienced by the Cape government in convincing the War Office to allow for concentrations. She explained that there were cases where soldiers of different forces had been buried together in an undesirable spot. Evidently, it was easier for the Cape government to have the bodies of Boer and Colonial soldiers removed, but regular soldiers were required to remain.¹¹³ These problems persisted past the British Army Council's October 1904 admission that some exceptions were needed to the general rule that soldiers should be buried where they fell.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, Frere stated that relatives' wishes should be considered in the delicate question of collecting soldiers' remains at cemeteries. In fact, as Frere noted, relatives typically gave their consent to have soldiers' remains collected into a single cemetery as better care could be taken of their graves afterwards. In most instances, relatives were thankful when a soldier's remains were removed to a cemetery, and the practice of removing bodies to consecrated ground was felt to be a "great satisfaction" by those involved.¹¹⁵

¹¹² TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3793 – Suggestion that question of removal of bodies of Imperial soldiers be referred to a committee, Georgina Frere to Colonel C.V. Crews, 5 August 1905.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3796 – Maintenance of Soldiers' Graves in Cape Colony, Care of soldiers' graves in South Africa, 25 October 1904.

¹¹⁵ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3793 – Suggestion that question of removal of bodies of Imperial soldiers be referred to a committee, Georgina Frere to Colonel C.V. Crews, 5 August 1905.

Grave markings themselves also proved to be a problem. Originally, Christian graves were marked with a simple wooden cross. However, a report for 1906 and 1907 from the Victoria League detailed how wooden crosses could not hold up to the conditions of South Africa. Specifically, weather and white ants caused the degradation of most of the crosses. As a result, the Guild of Loyal Women deemed that any crosses not already replaced by relatives should be replaced with a headstone made of marble, iron, or stone, as these were deemed suitable materials. The Guild also sought to replace each cross itself, with funds from the British War Office.¹¹⁶

More problems persisted when the Guild of Loyal Women took over care of cemeteries from the British Army. By the time the Guild began caring for established cemeteries, many of them had become overgrown with weeds or grass, or suffered from the fading of grave markings due to the South African climate. Furthermore, the Guild ran into similar problems as Milner in that records were incomplete and there were very few registers of the burials. However, the Guild was eventually able to establish 100 cemeteries with complete registers and bring in isolated graves, after Milner's published principle that six graves denoted a cemetery.¹¹⁷

1.10 The Physical Maintenance of Graves and the End of the Guild of Loyal Women

Although the Guild of Loyal Women retained a significant stake in the maintenance of war graves from the South African War, its activities typically focused on the location, identification, registration, and commemoration of individual graves. The military

¹¹⁶ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3800. Payment for crosses on soldiers' graves in South Africa, South African Graves Fund of the Victoria League – Report 1906 and 1907, 1 May 1907.

¹¹⁷ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3797. Appointment of a Local Committee on the care of Military Graves in Cape Colony, Time Article: South African Graves Fund, 2 November 1905.

cemeteries themselves were cared for either by the local garrison or by the Public Works Department in South Africa.

In 1908, R.H. Brade explained the situation with respect to the care of cemeteries in South Africa. In Natal, Fort Napier, and Pietermaritzburg, care for cemeteries was assigned to the Imperial Military Garrison. In Durban, the cemetery was maintained by the Durban Light Infantry. Battlefield cemeteries throughout South Africa were maintained by the Public Works Department, which hired European caretakers and native labourers to maintain graves. Brade also referred to older Zululand cemeteries, which were cared for by road parties under Public Works.¹¹⁸

While Brade's correspondence focused on cemeteries, he also made reference to individual graves in the Orange River Colony. The trustees of the Maintenance of Graves Trust Fund within the Guild and League were given charge of individual graves throughout the colony, maintaining some graves themselves or occasionally appointing caretakers for particular cemeteries.¹¹⁹ Meanwhile, Cape Colony and the Transvaal maintained graves in different manners. In Cape Colony, most cemetery land was eventually expropriated and put into the care of the government. All Resident Magistrates were required to carry out periodic inspections and to report necessary maintenance to keep the graves and burial grounds in proper order. Property owners provided the upkeep for graves on property that had not been expropriated due to special circumstances. Maintenance for graves in public cemeteries was completed and paid for by the Board of Trustees for the graves fund. Military garrisons played no part in graves upkeep in the Cape Colony region.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3802. Payment for crosses on soldiers graves in South Africa, R.H. Brade to Georgina Frere, 7 August 1908.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

In the Transvaal, the government undertook care of graves. Each cemetery, regardless of its location, was visited at least once a year and put into good repair. In garrison towns, the burial grounds were maintained by the military authorities. However, it was generally understood that should the garrisons pull out or be reduced, the government would take over the work, as had happened at Middelburg.¹²¹

By 1911, there was no further need for the Guild of Loyal Women. On 23 March 1911, the Federal Council of the Guild passed a resolution to disband after ensuring that its work had been handed over to the Victoria League of Great Britain. Its work in South Africa was carried out by a collection of branches from the now defunct Guild of Loyal Women organized into a local association, known as the South African Graves Association. It had branches in the Pretoria, Germiston, and Potchefstroom.¹²²

1.11 The Emergence of Private Citizen Concern for Soldiers' Burials in the Twentieth Century

Following the Boer War, the sentiment that emerged during the post-Cardwell reforms extended into the turn of the twentieth century with new imperial conflicts. This extension was the natural continuation of sentiments that emerged following the Crimean War. Civilians started to become quite concerned about old cemeteries and burial grounds from wars a hundred years earlier. In some cases, they wrote to military or political officials with their concerns and ideas to either protect these burial sites or cemeteries or, when required, remove the remains to a more appropriate site.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/3807 – Dissolution of the Guild of Loyal Women of South Africa and future care of military Graves in South Africa, Governor-General Gladstone to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lewis Harcourt, 6 January 1913.

What is most interesting here is that civilians began to look at decades- and even centuries- old cemeteries from long past battles. One likely reason was learned experiences from the Boer War and the intense attention of civilians and soldiers on burials. This, too, was widespread, affecting both Britain and Canada. The shift in views, especially in such a short period of time, shows that the perception of death that had been changing in the nineteenth century underwent yet another shift in the early twentieth century. While Patricia Jalland earlier argued that there were only two changes in the history of death between 1830 and 1920, it would seem that there were three changes, with the dawn of the twentieth century sparking a renewed interest in how soldiers' deaths were treated.

Some of the earliest shifts in the public attitude towards graves can be found in the peculiar instance of the Givet military cemetery in France, a cemetery for British prisoners of war during the Napoleonic Wars. In May 1908, the Secretary of the Office of Works received a letter from R. H. Brade regarding British burials in the military cemetery at Givet, in France. A registrar of deaths of British prisoners of war in France between 1803 and 1804 was found, suggesting they had been buried at the cemetery in Givet. The letter inquired as to funding for the repair of cemeteries.¹²³

The request was prompted by Monsieur Wauthier, Gendarme of Givet, who was inquiring if the King of England wanted to honour the memory of the soldiers who were buried in unmarked graves in Givet. Along with the registrars of death, there were also the memoirs of a British chaplain who volunteered to remain as a prisoner of war to record the conditions. His experiences were later published as the memoirs of Reverend Wolfe.

¹²³ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/9025 – Memorials and Graves: War Memorials – Proposed memorial to British prisoners of war buried at Givet, France, O144/3654 (C.1) R. H. Brade to Secretary, Office of Works, 7 May 1908.

However, the cemetery was in quite poor repair and had none of the ‘character’ from when it was last used in 1850. Due to this, Wauthier explained that it was impossible to separate the English graves in the abandoned cemetery from the French and foreign burials.¹²⁴ Furthermore, the cemetery was close to a road used by tourists travelling between Givet and Dinant. The French desired to build a road through the cemetery, which would destroy it. As such, Wauthier thought some form of commemoration was necessary that would remind tourists, especially British tourists, of the sacrifice their countryman made in Givet.¹²⁵

In the first letter from Souvenir Français to Sir F. Bertie, the French explained that they acquired the land to offer it to the British for a memorial. However, if that piece of property was not convenient, they were also willing to offer a section of the current cemetery. As for the commemorative aspect, the French offered for a monument to be built at the intersection of two roads close to where the cemetery was located. The other option was erect a monument commemorating the British soldiers in a piece of what was the cemetery, but it would also be at the intersection of two roads.¹²⁶ After completing one of these options, the French planned to obliterate the cemetery. This caused concern for British officials, who were unsure where to place a monument commemorating soldiers when the cemetery would later be destroyed. Furthermore, British officials were not keen

¹²⁴ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/9026 – Memorials and Graves: War Memorials – Proposed memorial to British prisoners of war buried at Givet, France, Souvenir Français to Sir F Bertie [translated], 5 November 1908.

¹²⁵ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/9025 – Memorials and Graves: War Memorials – Proposed memorial to British prisoners of war buried at Givet, France, Monsieur Wauthier, Gendarme, of Givet, to the British Ambassador, Paris [translated], 16 March 1908.

¹²⁶ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/9026 – Memorials and Graves: War Memorials – Proposed memorial to British prisoners of war buried at Givet, France, Souvenir Français to Sir F Bertie [translated], 5 November 1908.

on an elaborate monument, which was in contrast to the French perception.¹²⁷ Ultimately, British officials opted not to develop a memorial for Givet. This was not because Givet lacked importance. Instead, British officials believed that it was not suitable to have a memorial commemorating a cemetery that was to be destroyed.¹²⁸ This view was accepted by the British War Office and the British Admiralty.

Similarly, Canadians became interested in their own conflicts and the burials of soldiers who defended British North America before the creation of Canada. Interest in the gravesites of the War of 1812 soldiers started in the 1870s. In August and September 1876, a group set out to discover the gravesite of Tecumseh, who perished at the Battle of the Thames in 1813. The Committee of the United Canadian Association was appointed to search for the remains. Using information given to them by Jacob Jamieson, a companion of Tecumseh's, the committee was able to find the gravesite of Tecumseh.¹²⁹ His remains were collected into a casket and brought to Niagara, where they were placed in a vault.¹³⁰

Little attention seems to have been paid to the gravesites of regular soldiers and militiamen from the War of 1812, and the battlefields themselves. Early concerns were recorded at the turn of the twentieth century. In May 1912, a concerned citizen from Hemmingford Quebec, George Lownsbrough, wrote to Sir Sam Hughes, then Minister of

¹²⁷ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/9026 – Memorials and Graves: War Memorials – Proposed memorial to British prisoners of war buried at Givet, France, Francis Bertie to Edward Gray Bart, 2 December 1908.

¹²⁸ TNA, War Office Fonds, Box WO 32/9026 – Memorials and Graves: War Memorials – Proposed memorial to British prisoners of war buried at Givet, France, NL 13301 to the Undersecretary of State – Foreign Office, 21 December 1908.

¹²⁹ *The Globe and Mail* article also notes that Chief Johnson provided the Committee of the United Canadian Association with the diagram.

¹³⁰ Unknown, "Tecumseh's Exhumation: The Remains of the Great Shawnee Undoubtedly Found," *The Globe and Mail*, September 1, 1876, accessed February 12, 2017, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/hnpglobeandmail/docview/1523982428/E8D80D35D5B7467APQ/4?accountid=15115>.

Militia and Defence, about the graves of soldiers buried by the Lacolle River. He noted the history of the battles that took place in the vicinity between 1812 and 1814.

However, Lownsbrough quickly introduced his observation of the poor conditions of the graves. He noted that the land had been undisturbed for approximately eighty years until it was recently sold, after which it was used for farming and was ploughed each year. Lownsbrough saw the ploughing of the burial mounds as a slight against the dead in the area. He explained that with the recent influx of money to build monuments on battlefields, the Dominion of Canada should attempt to do something to honour the dead. He further noted previous attempts to preserve the land, but that those efforts had brought no action.¹³¹

The military's response was quick. By the end of May 1912, a request to have the site examined was given to the Officer Commanding the 4th Divisional Area in Montreal.¹³² Upon inspection with Lownsbrough, the military official was unable to find absolute proof that the graves were actually close to Lacolle Mill. He noted that Lownsbrough pointed him to irregular elevations of land stating they were the burials. As a result, the officer suggested that a monument be placed at the site noting that victims were buried near the monument. Furthermore, he also suggested that since the blockhouse was still standing, it should be preserved as a historical relic.¹³³

¹³¹ Library and Archives Canada, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24-C-1-a, Box 370, File Part 1, File HQ-54-6-10 (Preservation of the Graves of Troops who fell in the Battle of Lacolle Mill, Quebec, During War of 1812), "Correspondence 54-6-10 – George Lownsbrough to The Honourable Minister of Militia," 20 May 1912.

¹³² LAC, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24-C-1-a, Box 370, File Part 1, File HQ-54-6-10 (Preservation of the Graves of Troops who fell in the Battle of Lacolle Mill, Quebec, During War of 1812), "Correspondence 54-6-10 – Master-General of Ordnance – Canadian Militia to O.C. 4th Divisional Area, Montreal," 27 May 1912.

¹³³ LAC, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24-C-1-a, Box 370, File Part 1, File HQ-54-6-10 (Preservation of the Graves of Troops who fell in the Battle of Lacolle Mill, Quebec, During War of 1812), "H.Q. 54-6-10 – 4.D.I5.I-8 – Officer Commanding, 4th Division to Secretary of Militia Council," 20 September 1912.

Unfortunately, military officials were not able to commence honouring the victims of the War of 1812 promptly. They were unable to find records of how the property was divested from the British Crown to its current owner. As a result, they first started working on designing a monument to be placed close to the mounds suspected of being burials. The final result was an obelisk costing \$575.¹³⁴ Next, military officials called a meeting at Lacolle to interview the owners of two properties, one where the bodies were suspected to have been buried and the other where the blockhouse stood.

Efforts to secure a site close to the mounds were successful, but the efforts to secure the blockhouse were not. The owner, Mr. Bullock, refused to sell the blockhouse for less than \$1000. It was the committee's view that the building, including property, was not worth more \$200, and thus did not proceed. The committee was able to secure an option for a half acre of land for \$50 from Mr. Boudreau, the second land owner. However, this option was only for the mounds themselves, where the monument would be placed, not for the blockhouse.¹³⁵

Despite the success of the committee in securing the land, military bureaucracy interfered. Evidently, according to Canadian militia law, attempts to appropriate land must be directly related to the militia. Furthermore, the appropriation of land for the purpose of memorials and burial sites was not allowed. During the negotiations to acquire the land, the question of historic sites had been raised in Parliament. The resulting decision was that a special commission would be formed to look at historic sites across Canada. As a result,

¹³⁴ LAC, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24-C-1-a, Box 370, File Part 1, File HQ-54-6-10 (Preservation of the Graves of Troops who fell in the Battle of Lacolle Mill, Quebec, During War of 1812), "H.Q. 54-6-10 Lieut-Col – DGES to the Military Secretary M. & D," 10 February 1914.

¹³⁵ LAC, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24-C-1-a, Box 370, File Part 1, File HQ-54-6-10 (Preservation of the Graves of Troops who fell in the Battle of Lacolle Mill, Quebec, During War of 1812), "J. A. McNeil to the Minister of Militia," 6 March 1914.

the military secretary, informed Reverend J. A. McNeil that he should take the question of a memorial at Lacolle Mill up with the Right Honourable Premier and the new commission on historic sites.¹³⁶ Ultimately, the military memorial at Lacolle Mill did not proceed in 1914.¹³⁷ It is interesting to note that under Canadian militia law, attempts to appropriate land for the purpose of burial sites were disallowed. Despite private citizens' concern about old gravesites, the military only haphazardly cared to honour old gravesites of their fallen soldiers by 1914.¹³⁸

Interest among private citizens also arose concerning the Northwest Rebellion and burials that had occurred during the conflict. In April 1910, A.L. Young of the Imperial Service Medal Association in Winnipeg sent a letter to Thomas MacNutt, a Member of Parliament in Ottawa, outlining concerns for isolated graves from Fish Creek and Batoche that had been neglected since the time of burial. They included the graves of gunners De

¹³⁶ LAC, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24-C-1-a, Box 370, File Part 1, File HQ-54-6-10 (Preservation of the Graves of Troops who fell in the Battle of Lacolle Mill, Quebec, During War of 1812), "Lt-Col C.U.R to J. A. McNeil," 12 March 1914.

¹³⁷ Parks Canada placed a monument at Lacolle Mill in 1927.

¹³⁸ Similar sentiment continued into the 2000s when development projects began at old War of 1812 sites. In 2000, a harbour project was stalled in Toronto, Ontario, following the discovery of burials from the War of 1812. Multiple gravesites likely existed on lands including Fort York, the Canadian National Exhibition grounds, and areas to the west. A mass grave of American soldiers was also suspected to exist at Fort York, largely as a result of journal accounts from a British soldier, Ely Platyer. Furthermore, local historians explained that it was customary during the period to bury soldiers where they fell.¹³⁸ However, concerns were raised regarding the future of the site. Evidently, by 2000 Canadian military officials were still uninterested in excavating old burial sites. These concerns were similar to the 1912 Lacolle Mill incident, but also a 1909 example from Fort York where some graves were found and were discarded during development at Fort York. Even by the time of the bicentennial of the War of 1812, there was little interest in honouring soldiers' graves from the war. In 2012, two organizations applied for Government of Canada funding to help mark and preserve the decaying graves. The request was originally denied. However, after the public became engaged with the quest to mark graves, the Department of Canadian Heritage opted to reconsider the decision. Jacques Gallant of the *Toronto Star* explained that both vandalism and the passage of time, coupled with the lack of familiar connection, had allowed the known graves to fall into disrepair. Moreover, limited funds by churches and cemeteries added to the decay of graves. The main problem arose from of the lack of responsibility for maintaining War of 1812 gravesites. Veterans Affairs Canada pays for the funeral and burial arrangements for veterans of the First World War and subsequent conflicts. However, they are not mandated to care for graves from before the First World War. Moreover, the British Government was also not obligated to care for the graves.

Manolly, Cook, and Chas Armsworth at Fish Creek and the grave of Gunner Phillips at Batoche. Young explained that upon their deaths, the four soldiers were buried where they fell. He requested that the proper authorities be made aware so that the graves could be properly marked, fenced in, and cared for.¹³⁹

On 27 May 1910, the Militia Council was forwarded a separate petition received from the Imperial Service Medal Association. It requested the sum of \$1500 to secure the ground and erect the proper monuments. Furthermore, in submitting the petition to the Militia Council, the commanding officer for Military District 10 in Winnipeg noted that the requested amount to bring the graves into good standing order was deemed sufficient to complete the task. However, very little action took place between May and August 1910.¹⁴⁰

By August, the Deputy Minister of Militia submitted the petition for consideration. However, since the Royal North West Mounted Police was the commanding force during the Northwest Rebellion, the Militia Council deemed it necessary to write to the comptroller of the police force to request any further relevant information. In response, Lieutenant-Colonel Fred White, the comptroller of the Mounted Police, explained that the force had already identified, collected, and buried in one plot the remains of those who lost their lives north of Battleford. He also supplied the plan for the cemetery at Frog Lake, the

¹³⁹ LAC, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24-C-1-a, Box 372, File Part 1, File HQ-54-14-1 (Care of the graves of those who were killed at Fish Creek and other fights during the North West Rebellion, 1885), "A.L. Young to Thos MacNut, Esq, MP," 4 April 1910.

¹⁴⁰ LAC, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24-C-1-a, Box 372, File Part 1, File HQ-54-14-1 (Care of the graves of those who were killed at Fish Creek and other fights during the North West Rebellion, 1885), "H.Q.54-14-1 Memorandum from E.F. Jarvis, The Deputy Minister of Militia and Defence," 23 August 1910.

plot where the soldiers had been buried, though the plots did not show the names of the soldiers.¹⁴¹

However, the Department of Militia and Defence was satisfied that the North West Mounted Police had indeed been working to identify and mark the graves of those who had fallen. As a result, the department forwarded the petition to the police force requesting that it take over the matter. At the very least, the department wished for a suggestion regarding how it should proceed with the petition from the Veteran's Association.¹⁴²

In response, White explained that while the request of the Veterans Association was reasonable, more information was needed. He added that statements of information pertaining to locating actual places of internment were key. Furthermore, he noted that efforts to collect remains resulted in only a small amount of information being found as to the identities of the bodies. White added that in hindsight, it may have been more humane to have abstained from disturbing the original resting places altogether. He concluded that in his opinion, it would be better to erect some type of monument, possibly a stone or tablet, in a public space to record the names of all who perished during the Northwest Rebellion.¹⁴³

Meanwhile, the Department of Militia continued to look for further information on the graves of the soldiers. In October 1910, E.F. Jarvis, the acting Deputy Minister of Militia, requested that the commanding officer of Military District 10 in Winnipeg find out further information from both the Veterans Association and others who might be privy to

¹⁴¹ LAC, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24-C-1-a, Box 372, File Part 1, File HQ-54-14-1 (Care of the graves of those who were killed at Fish Creek and other fights during the North West Rebellion, 1885), "Lieutenant-Colonel Fred White to E.F. Jarvis," 21 September 1910.

¹⁴² LAC, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24-C-1-a, Box 372, File Part 1, File HQ-54-14-1 (Care of the graves of those who were killed at Fish Creek and other fights during the North West Rebellion, 1885), "Eugene Fiset to Lieutenant-Colonel Fred White," 28 September 1910.

¹⁴³ LAC, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24-C-1-a, Box 372, File Part 1, File HQ-54-14-1 (Care of the graves of those who were killed at Fish Creek and other fights during the North West Rebellion, 1885), "Lieutenant-Colonel Fred White to Eugene Fiset," 30 September 1910.

the burials of soldiers and volunteers during the Northwest Rebellion.¹⁴⁴ In response, the Department received the required information, but by this time winter had set in and the visual markers noted by Winnipeg residents could not be found until the spring.¹⁴⁵

By May 1911, the Mounted Police were out at Fish Creek and Batoche inspecting the graves. Superintendent C. Constantine reported to White that the graves at Fish Creek were covered with stones, which would need to be replaced. He further reported that there were small bushes that would need to be cut down, and that there had once been a wooden fence, but that it had been long destroyed by the prairie fires. Constantine explained that the graves at Batoche were in very poor shape. For example, one grave had two men buried in it and was marked by a piece of wood with the initials E.L.B., signifying Brown. Constantine suspected that the other man was Gunner Phillips. Constantine explained that reinterring the bodies in either gravesite was not advisable, as only small bone fragments would remain. Furthermore, a wood fence would be useless since prairie fires would quickly destroy it. Constantine proposed an iron fence to protect the graves.¹⁴⁶ His assessment was later approved by E.F. Jarvis and the plan commenced.

Like the War of 1812 request, the Northwest Rebellion preservation of isolated graves came long after the fact. Moreover, there was a surprising lack of information about where some of the soldiers had been buried. Despite this, military officials in the early twentieth century continued to work to ensure that the burials were properly marked and

¹⁴⁴ LAC, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24-C-1-a, Box 372, File Part 1, File HQ-54-14-1 (Care of the graves of those who were killed at Fish Creek and other fights during the North West Rebellion, 1885), "E.F. Jarvis to Military District No. 10 Commanding Officer," 4 October 1910.

¹⁴⁵ LAC, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24-C-1-a, Box 372, File Part 1, File HQ-54-14-1 (Care of the graves of those who were killed at Fish Creek and other fights during the North West Rebellion, 1885), "Lieutenant-Colonel Fred White to Colonel Eugene Fiset," 5 December 1910.

¹⁴⁶ LAC, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24-C-1-a, Box 372, File Part 1, File HQ-54-14-1 (Care of the graves of those who were killed at Fish Creek and other fights during the North West Rebellion, 1885), "Report: Graves at Fish Creek," 25 May 1911.

honoured after the fact. But why was there more of concern about previous burials in the twentieth century than there had been in the nineteenth? The likely reason is the learning experiences from burials of the Boer War.

1.12 Conclusion

While more coherent organizations were established closer to the turn of the twentieth century, there was still a strong desire among British soldiers to see their comrades appropriately buried after death. Specifically, during the Crimean War there was concern that graves would be properly maintained and cared for after the war. Such sentiments were in stark contrast to previous conflicts from the 1800s to the 1850s, during which time there were reports of improperly handling bodies and the possibility of grinding up human bones for use as bone meal. While the reports of grinding bones may be more satirical than true, the purpose of this satire could easily be to inform readers of the poor conditions soldiers' graves faced after British conflicts. In many cases throughout the nineteenth century, there were reports of cemeteries being in poor order, overgrown, or desecrated. Such reports show the lack of regard given to soldiers' graves after death and conflict.

However, Crimea was different. In Crimea both soldier and politician saw the importance of honouring the dead. Though some of the shift came because of increased soldier complaints about treatment and political willingness to address the issues, it was still a general shift to honour soldiers' sacrifices. Though there were failures in some cases to properly maintain graves, this re-emergence of honouring soldiers continued to grow

toward the end of the nineteenth century. By the time of the Boer War in 1899, politicians were looking at ways to ensure cemeteries would be honoured.

Learning from the need to assign caretakers to cemeteries after the Crimean War, the British military opted to have a private organization locate graves and complete identification and registration. Though there were failings in this work, most notably in South Africa, this largely came from a lack of communication between military authorities and civilian organizations. Furthermore, renewed commemorative efforts were in their infancy, likely because of the rise of the British Citizen Army and local connections between British regions and the units fighting in British wars.

After the Boer War, people in both Canada and Britain became interested in the burial sites of old wars, with private citizens writing to the government about old gravesites and cemeteries that had long been neglected. Government officials also became interested in ensuring the old sites were properly cared for. Sites like Batoche and Fish Creek in Canada were repaired and failed attempts were made to honour British graves at Givet. These actions show an intense interest in old battlefields and the burial grounds nearby.

The first British attempts to recognize the importance of burials came during the Second Anglo-Boer War with the request to properly mark and track graves. However, the first major international recognition came with the 1906 Geneva Convention, whereby certain practices such as looting bodies were forbidden. Thus, by the time of the First World War, there was a growing national interest in commemorating the gravesites of soldiers. This renewed national interest, coupled with the experience gained in the Crimea and the Boer War, helped to ensure that later graves and cemeteries were properly identified, marked, and cared for at the end of conflicts. The renewed interest was also helped by the

emergence of 'after-thoughts' – graves that existed both in Britain and Canada, such as Lacolle River, where civilians showed a marked interest in caring for old cemeteries. Or, at least this was the predominant thought entering the twentieth century.

Chapter 2: The First World War and the Uncertainty of Soldier Burials

While tensions were growing before the outbreak of the First World War, military planners were unprepared to deal with the sheer number of burials that would eventually be required. Battles like the Somme and Ypres saw masses of soldiers killed during single days as a result of modern warfare. While some of these soldiers were eventually buried following the battles, a significant number were left in no-man's-land, blown to pieces, or simply lost during the conflict. As a result, military burial policy underwent significant alteration. For example, the use of mass graves, while prevalent in the nineteenth century, was not considered appropriate in the twentieth century; however, mass graves were still used in times of necessity.

The degree of carnage was captured in various Canadian war paintings. One best-known example is F.H. Varley's *For What?*, depicts dead soldiers being collected in a cart for burial. While Varley questions the purpose of war and if it was worth the sacrifice, the painting itself reflects the poor conditions of burials during warfare. Paintings such as Maurice Cullen's *Dead Horse and Rider in a Trench*, allude to the scattered carcasses of both heroes and horses across the battlefield. Others, like Alfred Bastien's *Dressing Station in the Field – Arras, 1915*, show a casualty station and casualties typical of the First World War. Art immortalized the struggles soldiers experienced on the front when confronted with death and burial.

Literature also captured the expected carnage of the First World War. For example, *Channel Firing* was written by Thomas Hardy and depicted corpses in a graveyard to the background of artillery fire. The poem was written in 1914, before the start of the First World War, but displayed the expected result of new modern warfare.

The eventual establishment of burial organizations, such as the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC), helped to establish recognizable and standardized practices toward the end of the war. Attributing the evolution of burial policy entirely to such organizations as the IWGC would not be proper.¹ Experience from the frontlines helped to establish a rudimentary policy that aided chaplains and burial parties in ensuring that a soldier received a final resting place, while at the same time working to safeguard the lives of those who took risks burying soldiers. It was through these experiences that the later burial organizations, starting with the Graves Registration Commission in 1915, were founded after military authorities realized that a soldier's wellbeing was a predominant concern among the living. Although soldiers' experiences on the frontlines helped to determine the way in which a body should be buried, it was still common for burials to cause uncertainty and confusion due, in some cases, to the unique circumstances of each burial.²

This chapter focuses on how the body was treated immediately after death during the First World War. Although formal organizations such as the Graves Registration Commission (GRC) and the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries (DGR&E) were created to help organize the chaos of burials, it was the common soldiers' experiences and desire to ensure a comrade's burial that really drove the need to modernize and improve wartime burials on the front lines. This chapter also focuses on the problems that emerged while applying new policies and how these problems were later addressed by military

¹ The Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) was given official recognition in May, 1917. The first of its kind, the IWGC started with the task of registering the graves of fallen soldiers, and was eventually left in charge of creating and creating cemeteries for both the World Wars. Despite its establishment, the IWGC held no formal control over graves or cemeteries until after the end of the war.

² Library and Archives Canada, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 3444, File S-2-51 (Shipment of Bodies of deceased soldiers to Canada WGS), "Correspondence: 649-M-15501," 1 April 1919.

brass. Major themes include the removal of bodies, the burial of bodies on the war front, the creation of cemeteries, and commemoration at cemeteries. A clearer picture of remembrance following the First World War can be established by describing the events that followed the deaths of soldiers.

2.1 Start of the First World War – The Ideal Burial

While members of the DGR&E focused on the main tasks of registering graves, collecting cause-of-death information, and photographing soldiers' graves for their loved ones, individual battalions and units were assigned the duty of burying the dead. At the beginning of the war, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) often employed the outdated practice of mass graves at the front. Although the British military used mass graves at the beginning of the war, it began to reform this practice and started to implement the use of individual graves in military cemeteries. With these reforms came the need to standardize other practices of treating the body, including how graves and cemeteries were determined, the marking of graves, and various other burial procedures.

At the start of the First World War, international accords and British regulations had addressed how a body was treated after death and the responsibilities of belligerents. These documents include the 1906 Geneva Convention and the 1909 Field Service Regulations (modified in 1914). After a year of warfare, the British Army published a General Routine Order in December 1915 on "Clearing a Battlefield," which further modified burial procedures. Combined, these documents detailed how to perform the burials of friendly and enemy forces.

The 1906 Geneva Convention addressed the responsibilities of belligerents when dealing with wounded enemy soldiers and enemy dead. For example, Article 3 guarantees

protection against the looting of bodies. Although the focus was on wounded soldiers in enemy possession, it specifies that belligerents still in control of the battlefield must conduct a careful examination of the dead prior to interment or incineration.³ Similarly, Article 4 requires that “after every engagement the belligerent who remains in possession of the field of battle shall take measures to search for the wounded and to protect the wounded and dead from robbery and ill treatment. He will see that a careful examination is made of the bodies of the dead prior to their interment or incineration.”⁴

In the original 1909 Field Service Regulations, later revised to the 1914 edition, the British Army laid out general rules that were to be followed by military personnel on the battlefield. Specifically, the regulations laid down rules for dealing with casualties, clearing hospitals, prisoners of war, and enemy dead. For example, enemy bodies were to be collected and buried by fatigue parties. Further, soldiers were sometimes required to search a battlefield for additional enemy dead. If this happened, burials were postponed until there was an adequate examination of the dead.⁵ Information about the dead was then recorded on a form, AFB 103B, and the bodies, along with their effects, were sent to the Adjutant General’s Branch (AG Branch).⁶

Whereas the Field Service Regulations provided little in the way of detail regarding the British Army dealing with its own dead, historical documents looking at casualties at the start of the War outline the policy used on the front. In cases where a soldier died in the field, the units were responsible for preparing the body for shipment to a mortuary and

³ “Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armies in the Field,” International Committee of the Red Cross, accessed June 16, 2016, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/180?OpenDocument>. Article 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Article 4.

⁵ British War Office, *Field Service Regulations, Part II, Organization and Administration, 1909* (London: War Office, 1914), 149-150.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

burial.⁷ A label would then be sewn onto the soldier's clothing, which stated his regimental number, rank, company, regiment, and religion. The chaplain of the soldier's religion was informed that the body needed to be buried so that he might perform the last rites. After this, a burial return was submitted, which gave the map location of the grave and, if possible, the arrangements made for marking the grave.⁸ Chaplains were also required to send weekly burial returns to Corps Headquarters denoting name, rank, and the unit of soldiers buried by the chaplain. Personal effects were also collected and sent to the Deputy Adjutant-General (DAG) 3rd Echelon to be forwarded to the Estates Branch of the Army.⁹

Although the historical notes on casualties and burials provide a detailed account of the ideal circumstances for burial, there were rarely ideal circumstances when trying to conduct recovery or burial of bodies during the war. By 26 August 1915, General Routine Order 1104 was sent to all troops within the British Army. The order provided further information on burials and treatment of the body. The order makes reference to Section 115 of the Field Service Regulations, specifying that it will be followed when possible and modified when circumstances dictate. Both allied and enemy dead were to be collected following a battle. The bodies of officers and non-commissioned officers were to be interred in separate trenches from enemy dead. In cases of senior officers or generals, the senior representative of the Adjutant-General's Branch would give directions. Effects were to be tied to the ID tags of each soldier and then sent to the Deputy Adjutant-General Headquarters, 3rd Echelon. Finally, the officers of the burying party were tasked with

⁷ The exception to this rule was if a soldier was admitted to a Field Ambulance or Casualty Clearing Station, where soldiers at the station would prepare the body for burial.

⁸ LAC, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24, Box 1860 (Cummings Monographs WW1), File 60 (Casualties), "Reporting of Casualties."

⁹ Ibid.

entering the names, numbers and other details of each body placed in the grave. The list was to be forwarded to the AG's Branch.¹⁰

Personal effects and ID tags were again dealt with under General Order AQ 4085, which further established guidelines for identity discs and personal effects collected from dead soldiers. Officers were required to collect the identity discs and personal effects of soldiers. Once collected, the identity discs were sent back to each unit to confirm casualties and officers were expected to mark the burial location of the body. Once the effects had been collected and the casualty confirmed, the information, along with identity discs and personal effects, was sent to the officer commanding the unit. The personal effects were subsequently sent to next of kin.¹¹

2.2 The Chaotic Front – The Use of Mass and Common Graves

Though the British official policy established an ideal scenario for burials, conditions on the front, coupled with practices and experiences from previous wars, dictated a much different way in which burials were conducted. The most notable of these was the use of mass burial plots, also known as common graves. Mass burials were situations in which many soldiers, in some cases up to 300, were buried in a common area without individual plots. Other examples include using an old trench line or shell hole to

¹⁰ It is important to note that the General Routine Order makes reference to section 115 of the Field Service Regulations, Part II. Since the Field Service Regulations were printed in 1909, reprinted in 1913 and amended in 1914, the 1914 version of the regulations were used for comparison. In the 1914, section 115 only makes reference to prisoners of war and enemy's dead and does not in fact deal with the clearing of battlefields of friendly forces. Thus, it is assumed that the General Routine Order amended section 115 in December, 1915.

Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Box 2028, Folder GRC 7 – Extracts from General Routine Orders 1st March 1915 – Extracts from General Routine Orders 1st December 1915 Parts 1 and 2, “Extracts from General Routine Orders Issued to the British Army in the Field – Field-Marshal Sir J. D. P. French – Part 1: Adjutant-General's Branch.” 1 December 1915, 17-19

¹¹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3, Box 4045, Folder 3 File 4 (Burials and Cemeteries– 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade, 1st Canadian Division), “Letter from Major-General H.N. Sargent,” August, 1916.

bury soldiers. Smaller versions of mass plots saw multiple soldiers, usually around twenty, buried in one plot. Mass burials also lacked appropriate documentation denoting whose body was buried where. These types of burials were typically conducted when the body count was high, but could occur as a result of an advance or other military manoeuvre.

Historian Jeroen Geurst explains that until the First World War the British Army had traditionally interred soldiers' bodies in mass graves. The one exception to this practice was for the higher ranks, who were typically buried individually and given military honours.¹² Historically, this was due to class since rankers were lower class citizens. Geurst also explains that some of the first British burials during the War were marked with simple wooden crosses. These crosses varied in size and style since there were cases where the next-of-kin would cross the English Channel and bring a finely wrought cross to place at a dead relative's grave.¹³ In other cases, burial parties would plant a rifle in the ground with a helmet at the top of the rifle to denote the grave of a fallen soldier. Though there were some who were granted both graves and crosses, Geurst explained that burial parties were routinely forced to gather personal items for identification and confirmation of death prior to dumping the bodies into old bomb craters.¹⁴

The use of common graves was confirmed by an order from the Third Canadian Infantry Battalion – 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade. The commanding officer of the brigade instructed his men to start burials after dusk on the 8th of an unknown month.¹⁵ Issued at 11:35 am, the order demanded that troops detail a burial party to “bury remaining dead

¹² Jeroen Geurst, *Cemeteries of the Great War By Sir Edwin Lutyens* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2010), 13.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁵ Unfortunately, no month or year was given for the order.

lying around rear of x right + left.”¹⁶ In addition, the order stipulated that the bodies should be laid in one grave with map locations to be marked.¹⁷ The 1st Canadian Brigade example, specifically the reference to “one grave,” indicates early usage of mass burials for groups of men, a practice that was common in nineteenth-century conflicts such as the Crimean and Boer Wars. Again, military officials resorted to previous burial practices, despite problems that existed with their use in nineteenth-century campaigns.

In addition to burials on the front, soldiers who perished in British hospitals were occasionally buried in common graves. A memo from Colonel Frank A. Reid of the British Adjutant General’s Branch attached documents that described deaths in British hospitals as typically chaotic, and that the required documentation was not normally provided. Moreover, he explained the usage of common graves for soldiers, noting that ten to twelve soldiers were often buried in a single grave. Reid concluded that such situations would make identification difficult.¹⁸

Despite the continuance of common graves, British and Canadian authorities attempted to eliminate, or at least mitigate, this practice in France mid-way through the war. In April 1916, a report from the 58th Canadian Infantry Battalion, 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade, instructed burial parties to bury bodies in plots once they had been selected. In addition, parties were to remove any patches, badges, or other markings that might help to identify the deceased soldier.¹⁹ These markings were to be placed in an effects

¹⁶ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3, Box 4036, Folder 1 File 12 (3rd Canadian Infantry Battalion, 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade), “Sender number TR 62. Sent on the 8th at 11:35 am,”

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III A1, Box 28, File 8-1-7 (Graves Registration, Colonel Frank A. Reid to Major-General J. W. Carson), “Graves Registration” 17 October 1916.

¹⁹ One early problem with identity tags was that they were being removed as a confirmation of death. This led to the inability to identify the bodies as the identity tags had already been removed.

LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3, Box 4137, Folder 1 File 18 – Burials and Cemeteries – 28th Canadian Infantry Battalion, 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade, “A (a) 10-4,” 5 April 1918.

bag and sent to divisional headquarters.²⁰ This would allow individual graves to be properly marked from the personal effects, something that was not an issue when using mass graves. The idea of an effects bag quickly evolved into standard practice throughout the war.

While mass graves were predominantly used on the front, the practice also occurred in Britain, albeit with less frequency than on the front. For example, in March 1917, B. B. Cubitt of the London War Office wrote a letter to George Perley, the High Commissioner for Canada, which highlighted this issue. Cubitt reassured Perley that the plight of Dominion troops had been raised with the War Office, which decided that all Dominion troops who died in hospitals in Britain should be buried in single graves.²¹ Cubitt closed by explaining that the general feeling in Britain was to “ensure that the last resting places of these soldiers, who have died far away from their homes, may realise the wishes of their relatives and kinsfolk overseas and be not unworthy of the cause in which they died.”²² The specific reference to ‘single graves’ in Cubitt’s letter helps establish the use of mass graves in Britain since previous practices had been to bury soldiers in one grave.

Though there was a concerted effort to eliminate the use of mass graves, the First World War proved to be a chaotic period when implementing a common burial policy. While mass burials led to the use of temporary and official cemeteries, they also proved to be an easy method of burying a large number of bodies after heavy losses during continuing conflicts. Despite this, in areas where conflicts were not present, such as the home front,

²⁰ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3, Box 4197, Folder 1 File 10 – Burials and Cemeteries – 58th Canadian Infantry Battalion, 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade, “Q/S/O. 9 (Appendix II),” April 1916, 2.

²¹ LAC, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24, Box 1216, File HQ 512-19-1-A – Policy and Procedure – Location of Graves – CEF, “B. B. Cubitt – CEF./2537 (DGR&E),” 8 March 1917.

²² Ibid.

the use of mass graves continued well into 1917. Even then, pressure was mounting to eliminate the outdated army practice of mass graves.

2.3 Entering the Abyss: Initial Problems with Burials in the First World War

Instead of an efficient burial program, burials were usually haphazard. In 1915, burials in France took place either in military burial grounds adjacent to camps, or in public cemeteries that had allotted land for military use.²³ In other cases, commanders were to jot down map references for individual graves on the battlefield. Later, they would write an entry into field books to note cause of death and place of burial.²⁴ With each of these graves, a list of details including name, rank, and cause of death were stored in a bottle and placed on each grave. Within two to three weeks in most cases, a proper wooden cross with an affixed metal plate replaced the bottle used to mark the graves; the metal plate provided the details for that particular burial.²⁵

Extracts from the 1st Canadian Division Routine Orders denote additional procedures relating to the burial of soldiers on the front. While chaplains were to be present at all burials, not all situations on the front allowed for this, something that was quickly realized by military officials. This resulted in the need to formalize procedures in the event that a chaplain could not be present. As such, Routine Order 121 from 6 March 1915 explained that every officer who conducted a funeral service in the absence of a chaplain was required to fulfill certain tasks after the burial. These included the temporary marking

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3, Box 4034, Folder 2, Book 3-4, "Book 3 (Correspondences)," 12 October 1915, 151.

²⁵ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 1147, File R-191-4 – Procedure Re Graves Registration (RR 3-13 Volume 1), "Officer i/c A2 to DAG – Canadian Record Office (Appendix: Memorandum re Registration of Graves and Supply of Information to Next of Kin)," 17 November 1915.

of the grave, reporting all relevant soldier details to Brigade Headquarters, and placing two bottles at the grave, one buried a foot beneath the soil and the other placed at the head of the grave, and making a report to the Chaplain General. Following the receipt of the grave particulars, engineers were to prepare a distinctive cross to mark the grave.²⁶

Confusion over burials also ensued due to the constant fighting on the Western Front. In a letter from the 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade to the Officer Commanding of the 28th Battalion, the staff captain explained that recent reports of soldiers being buried near the trenches were not only troubling, but also dishonourable to the fallen. The unnamed commanding officer stipulated that burials should only be done in or near trenches in extreme circumstances, upon permission from Brigade Headquarters, and with the presence of chaplains. The reason stated was that the Canadian government had already acquired plots for the graves of soldiers. These plots were to be used to give each soldier an honourable burial. This would also allow the burials to be registered by the Graves Registration Commission. Finally, it was emphasized that the registration of burials would prove to be “a source of consolation to the relatives and friends of the deceased to know that his grave is well looked after.”²⁷ In addition to the stated problem, however, was the constant use of high explosive artillery. Burying bodies so close to the front increased the likelihood that graves would be either lost or destroyed during artillery barrages.

Further issues befell chaplains who were initially intended to console and provide last rites to wounded and dying soldiers. However, they were routinely required to

²⁶ LAC, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24, Box 1860 – Cummings Monographs WW1, File 60 – Casualties, “Extracts from 1st Canadian Division Routine Orders – 121. Burials,” 6 March 1915.

²⁷ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3, Box 4137, Folder 1, File 18 – Burials and Cemeteries – 28th Canadian Infantry Battalion, 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade, “O.C. 28th Battalion,” 24 October, 1915.

complete alternate duties, sometime to the detriment of their official duties. For example, historian Duff Crerar notes

Chaplains served in ways unheard of since Ypres, scrambling across recaptured ground to maintain contact between aid posts, Headquarters, and support units. Working in dressing station and aid posts by day, at night they organized and guided stretcher parties, often hip-deep in water or mud, through shrapnel barrages, trying to get wounded out of the firing line or off the open ground where they had fallen. Many conducted ration and ammunition parties back to the line. Any time left over was devoted to burials.²⁸

Another problem with burials was the fact that there was no central registry of graves for soldiers. Initial attempts to report the death of soldiers were outlined in a letter from the British Army Adjutant-General's Branch to the Graves Registration Commission in April 1915. Major G. H. Stobart returned a list of amended suggestions on the types of registers that could be used and where the information should be sent. The list itself contained two types of registers: Nominal Registers and Geographic Registers. The Nominal Registers were to be forwarded to the AG's Office by Major Fabian Ware of the Commission. These registers were established as comprehensive reports to the Adjutant-General's Branch, which were verified and then sent back to Britain monthly. The second type, the Geographic Register, prepared by the regiments, chaplains, and medical units, were to be retained by the Commission until the end of the war. Although talk of registers started in 1915, the suggestion on registers provides few details about how they were to work or eventual implementation timelines.²⁹

²⁸ Duff Crerar, *Padres in No Man's Land: Canadian Chaplains and the Great War* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 117.

²⁹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 1266, File G-2-5, "Volume 1 – Graves Procedure 3rd Ech, G. H. Stobart – 3rd Echelon to GRC – Appendix A," 19 April 1915.

By December 1915, a letter was sent to Lieutenant A. W. Kelly, Commanding Officer of the Deputy Adjutant General – Canadian Section (3rd Echelon). The author explained the progress being made toward creating a ledger to outline the burials of deceased officers and soldiers, as well as its importance. There were, however, problems with creating such a ledger, namely the fact that a great number of burial reports and burial slips were missing. Without the information, soldiers' graves could be lost forever.³⁰ In addition, a letter from Major F. Logie Armstrong detailed further issues with burials and keeping an updated ledger of burial information. In particular, Armstrong noted that some Units had not been furnishing burial reports in cases where a soldier's body could not be recovered. If a soldier perished but the body was not recovered, a burial report was not created and therefore not submitted to the Deputy Adjutant-General's Office – Canadian Section. Armstrong requested that a burial report still be submitted even in cases where the body could not be buried. These reports were to contain as much detail as possible and state that the burial had not occurred, in order to help keep a complete record of the deaths of soldiers and their burials.³¹ Although the existence of the ledger seemed important at the time, most of the information was gleaned from burial reports returned to Corps Headquarters or the Graves Registration Commission, and organized into a comprehensive ledger.

Despite these established practices, many difficulties plagued attempts to bury soldiers. In France, there were numerous cases of isolated graves because fighting there was so intense that soldiers who fell had to be buried on the spot. As such, there are

³⁰ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 1147, File: R-191-4 – Procedure Re Graves Registration, “5A2. RO-42,” 29 December 1915.

³¹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 1191, File: B-2-5 Volume 1 – Rendition of Burial Reports by Units of CEF, “Records London, R.L. 26-7a,” 28 December 1915.

numerous reports detailing attempts by soldiers to ensure that these ‘isolated graves’ were properly marked on a grid map so that their location would not be lost.³² Similar reports note the lengths taken to properly bury, mark, and record an isolated grave, such as the one submitted to the 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade, 2nd Battalion. It details how a Private Letts could not be buried. While few details are given, it was noted that Private Letts’ company was retreating from the position where he was killed. Owing to the retreat, Letts’ body was not buried.³³ Similar casualty reports note that while it was known a soldier was killed, there was no record of him being buried, as was the case of Corporal W. Dawson.³⁴ Letts and Dawson help to speak to some of the wider difficulties experienced by soldiers on the front. While burial policies and practices were issued to soldiers, they could not always be followed due to circumstances during an advance or retreat.

By February 1916, battlefield conditions had produced yet another problem that burial parties needed to address: the discovery of bodies from previous offensives. A section of the Canadian Corps Routine Order 341 gave orders on the expected treatment of any discovered bodies. The problem had arisen that personal effects were being taken from these bodies by soldiers as souvenirs. As such, the order stipulated that any materials, especially identity discs and buttons, were to be carefully preserved and forwarded to the Adjutant-General’s Office. These items were to be accompanied by an account of the circumstances in which they were found and the map location of the body. The order

³² LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C5, Box 4395, Folder 2, File 4 – 2nd Canadian Field Company CE Burials and Cemeteries 24/3/1915 to 31/3/1918, “Letter to the Graves Registration Commission,” 24 September 1915.

³³ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3, Box 4034, Folder 2, Book 3-4, “Book 3 (Correspondences),” 27 October 1915, 175.

³⁴ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3, Box 4034, Folder 2, Book 3-4, “Book 3 (Correspondences),” 27 October 1915, 217.

concluded by explaining that “any negligence to comply these is to be very severely dealt with.”³⁵

While theft from French bodies was a significant problem, it was by no means the only issue that the French military needed to deal with. Burials were further impacted by the need for efficient movement and troop transport. In an example from October 1916, the French Mission sent a sharply worded letter to army headquarters, which was then reissued to field units. In the letter, the French Mission criticized the movement of British troops following operations at the Somme. Specifically, British forces had removed the crosses and other identification markers from the graves at a French military cemetery near the battle site. In another instance, British forces cut a shortcut through a French military cemetery, which destroyed approximately twenty French graves.³⁶ Such reports highlight the practical need to bury a body was more important than ensuring the emotional need for a burial was met through a proper grave.

With heavy shelling and washed-out battlefields, it was not uncommon for bodies to reappear after being buried or be found long after a battle had ended. A memo from June 1917 noted the 10th Field Company, Canadian Engineers’ discovery of “a number of skulls and bones and French equipment [...] on Lorette Ridge, also in front of old German front line in Souchez Valley near Souchez Village.”³⁷ Furthermore, a letter from May 1917 outlined newly discovered unburied bodies from the French Tenth Army which had fought

³⁵ LAC, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24, Box 1860 – Cummings Monographs WW1, File 60 – Casualties, “Extracts from: Canadian Corps Routine Orders – 341 – Discovered Bodies,” 9 February 1916.

³⁶ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3, Box 4036, Folder 1, File 12 – Burials and Cemeteries – 3rd Canadian Infantry Battalion, 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade, “First Army No. 5106.Q,” 30 October 1916.

³⁷ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C5, Box 4371, Folder 2, File 2 – 4th Canadian Divisional Engineers Burials and Cemeteries 8/8/1917 to 11/9/1917, “Ref. No. 16-0,” 1 June 1917.

in the attacks between Souchez and Arras in 1914 and 1915. This letter, sent by the Chef de la Mission Militaire Française, attached to the British Army, detailed the need for burials due to sanitation issues. Furthermore, it explained the lack of manpower available to clear the battlefield of unburied French bodies and requested that the Canadian forces complete the task.³⁸ In a subsequent letter, the French representative thanked the Canadian Corps for the devotion shown while interring the French bodies.³⁹

Additional problems emerged when soldiers – both allied and enemy – were buried where they fell. This created the issue of isolated and scattered graves at the front. A memo dated 4 July 1916 from the 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade discussed the need to prevent isolated graves to alleviate the loss of or damage to graves. However, this same memo also outlined the additional problem of temporary cemeteries too close to the front. Further, it specifically mentioned the lack of care given to graves at Railway Dugouts.⁴⁰ Another example, a letter from French officials dated 18 April 1917, outlined the fact that scattered and isolated graves could cause problems after the War. Additionally, officials feared that isolated graves may not always be respected, bringing disrespect to those who fell and to their families since there was a higher chance of not caring for the grave, or having it lost over the passage of time. The letter implored Canadian officials to do their part in ensuring that burials were done in a respectable and orderly manner.⁴¹

³⁸ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C5, Box 4371, Folder 2, File 2 – 4th Canadian Divisional Engineers Burials and Cemeteries 8/8/1917 to 11/9/1917, “A. 53-1-14,” 5 May 1917.

³⁹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3, Box 4045, Folder 3, File 4 – 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade, 1st Canadian infantry Division – Burials and Cemeteries – 6-7-16 to 27-2-18, “A.Q. 28-75,” 5 July 1917.

⁴⁰ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4036, Folder 1 File 12 – Burials & Cemeteries 3rd Canadian Infantry Battalion, 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade, March, 1915 to February 1917, “Ref: 35-44,” 4th July 1916.

⁴¹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4197. Folder 1 File 10 – Burials and Cemeteries – 58th Canadian Infantry Battalion, 9th Canadian infantry Brigade, 1-5-16 to 18-7-18, “A.53-1-16. 18,” April 1917.

Burials that took place either on or near the front suffered badly during subsequent military operations. Numerous instances were described in Canadian battalion memos in which temporary and permanent cemeteries were either damaged or destroyed by enemy artillery fire. In a December 1915 message to the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade, Major C. H. Vandersluys of the First Division explained that temporary cemeteries at Maple Copse and Sanctuary Wood were badly damaged.⁴² A 1920 letter from the commanding officer of the Canadian War Graves Detachment explained that these cemeteries were destroyed in 1918 by the German Spring Offensive. Although there were a few crosses standing, it was not certain if the crosses actually denoted graves.⁴³

Concerns were raised about identifying soldiers after the enemy had been burying allied troops following an advance. A report commissioned by the British War Office in August 1916 detailed the fear of not being able to properly commemorate allied soldiers buried by the enemy. In fact, this sentiment was one of the reasons for the initial attempts to create a graves registration organization during the war.⁴⁴ Towards the end of the war, rapid troop advance also led to problems collecting and burying the bodies of those who fell. A memo to the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade highlighted the dilemma of collecting bodies in recent operations after a significant amount of ground had been covered. The memo instilled a sense of urgent duty to report the locations of any deceased in an operational area.⁴⁵

⁴² LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4059, File 2 Folder 1 – Re-Rendition of Burial Reports by Units of CEF – Records London, “R.L. 26-7a,” 28 December 1915.

⁴³ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 3437, File E-3-51 – Enquiries – Burial Places, “1-Gen,” 19 January 1920.

⁴⁴ LAC, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24 Box 1216, File HQ 512-19-1-A – Policies and Procedure – Location of Graves, “The Registration and Care of Graves,” 26 August 1916.

⁴⁵ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 C3 Box 4059, Folder 1 File 15 – 5th Canadian Infantry Battalion 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade Burials and Cemeteries 21-8-17 to 14-11-18, “AQ 289214,” October 2, 1918.

Problems also existed with the gathering of war dead after an operation. For example, it became common practice that soldiers who were killed on the battlefield were later retrieved and placed on the roadside to await transportation or burial. However, in October 1918, the Staff Captain of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade was forced to circulate a message insisting that such a practice be stopped. Commanders did not want passing troops to see the massive number of dead following a battle as they were headed to the front, as it would impact their morale.⁴⁶

Superstition and religion also played an important role when burying soldiers. In October 1917, the Canadian Corps circulated a message detailing the beliefs of Chinese labourers.⁴⁷ Specifically, the Chinese were upset that their dead were not being buried in coffins, as their beliefs required a body to be buried in a coffin to aid decomposition.⁴⁸ There was concern among officials that the Chinese labourers could cause problems for the army if their beliefs were not respected. Thus, the memorandum specified that although providing coffins for the burial of every soldier was not feasible, they should be supplied to Chinese labourers. Furthermore, any supplies, such as old boxes, packing cases, or pieces of wood, should be given to the Chinese to construct coffins.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4059 Folder 1 File 15 – 5th Canadian infantry Battalion, 2nd Canadian infantry Brigade Burials and Cemeteries 21-8-17 to 14-11-18, “Copy to Captain E. R. C Meredith (For Information),” October 5, 1918.

⁴⁷ Chinese labourers were used throughout the war to dig trenches primarily, however, they were also used to clear the battlefield and helped to bury the dead. While the work was gruesome for anyone involved, it was especially for the Chinese labourers who believed that to touch dead bodies was to bring bad luck. Guoqi Xu, *Strangers on the Western Front: Chinese Workers in the Great War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 89, 99, 138.

⁴⁸ James L. Watson, “The Structure of Chinese Funerary Rites: Elementary Forms, Ritual Sequence, and the Primacy of Performance,” in *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*, ed. James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 15-16.

⁴⁹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C1 Box 3891 Folder 49 File 6 (HQ A&Q Chinese Troops), “Memorandum 5493 (Q.C.). From Major C. J. Daubeny (DAQMG),” 13 October, 1917.

Similarly, there were cultural problems when burying Japanese soldiers fighting for the Canadian Corps in France. In a letter from 1 May 1918, Captain Ross Leoquhou of the Canadian Army Service Corps (CASC) explained the failure to issue an official notice of death to the next of kin of five soldiers who perished in 1917.⁵⁰ Leoquhou explained that “the Japanese are very peculiar with regard to matters of [notification of death] and they highly prize any notification concerning the death of any of their relatives in action. A notification is generally framed and hung in a conspicuous place in their residence.”⁵¹ As such, Canadian military officials determined that they needed to ensure proper notification to soldiers with Japanese heritage in order to honour any cultural needs of Japanese soldiers and their relatives.

2.4 Burials During Heavy Fighting and Reporting Heavy Casualties

Burials during heavy fighting posed a recurring problem during the First World War, an issue that a great number of memorandums, communiqués, and briefing sheets addressed in the Canadian Corps. Though Captain H.F. Chettle’s October 1916 War Office communiqué detailed the realization that burials could never take place during heavy fighting situations, subsequent memos to the Canadian Corps attempted to establish procedures to deal with heavy fighting, while also attempting dignify the burial of soldiers. Memorandum No. 752, sent to the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade, 1st Canadian Division, outlined the process for reporting casualties during times of heavy fighting, including a list of criteria that needed to be met. Specifically, it stated that each division was to establish a

⁵⁰ Spelling of last name may be incorrect. The correspondence was only signed and had no typed signature block.

⁵¹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 1062, File D-27-4 Deceased Other Ranks. “Correspondence from Captain Ross Leoquhou to the Officer i/c Records – CEF,” 1 May 1918.

divisional casualty officer, who commanded the staff officer assigned to record casualties.⁵²

The casualty staff officer was then designated to collect all available information relating to the casualties. The information was divided into the brigades, battalions, units, or other formations that suffered the casualties, which was then relayed to the headquarters of the division, or the advanced headquarters if unable to report to division headquarters. The soldier's information was to be classified in either the Return A form or Return B form. Return A detailed an approximate number of casualties for the battle, including officers and their rank, as well as a specific number of 'heavy' casualties per battery or battalion.⁵³ Return A was intended to provide an estimate so that an appropriate number of reinforcements could be sent. Once more accurate information was collected, Return B was completed. It gave an accurate return of the casualties sustained by a unit. This included rank, initials, and the name of officers and other ranks.⁵⁴

The two returns explained how reporting was dealt with, but gave no reference to how casualties were buried during heavy fighting. Instead, General Order AQ 4085 *Instructions Regarding the Disposal of Dead Bodies on the Battlefield*, released in August 1916, detailed the procedure for regular burials and burials during heavy fighting. For cases where there was either heavy fighting or heavy bombardment, it detailed two different

⁵² LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4045, Folder 3 File 7 - Casualties – 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade, 1st Canadian Division, "Appendix A (Circular Memorandum – Reference No. 752 A – System of Reporting Casualties)," 25 April 1917.

⁵³ The Appendix makes reference to "Heavy Casualties." In the context, Heavy Casualties is referred to as 100 men or more per battalion. In cases of other units, it is used in proportion. The memo stipulates that numbers only needed to be reported to the nearest 50, so 121 casualties was wired as 100 casualties, while 129 was wired as 150 casualties.

⁵⁴ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4045, Folder 3 File 7 - Casualties – 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade, 1st Canadian Division, "Appendix A (Circular Memorandum – Reference No. 752 A – System of Reporting Casualties)," 25 April 1917.

circumstances in which traditional burials should not be attempted and the alternative practices that were to be used. The circumstances in which alternative practices should be used included heavy bombardment where bodies could not be evacuated, when graves could not be dug, and when a body was found in no-man's-land. However, the order stipulated that burials still needed to be accomplished. To this end, graves were to be three to four feet deep. If bodies could not be removed, or graves could not be dug, then the bodies were to be placed in either disused trenches or shell holes and then covered with quicklime and earth.⁵⁵ Thus, in extreme circumstances, soldiers could still ensure some form of burial by burying bodies in mass graves.⁵⁶ In cases where a body could be seen by the enemy, the order directed soldiers to make every effort to use sprayers or sprinklers to reach the body under the cover of darkness. Soldiers were to then sprinkle the body with a solution of cresol, specifically half a pint to one gallon.⁵⁷ This was to attend to the smell of decay emanating from the body.⁵⁸

A later version of burial instructions was issued around March 1918. In these later instructions, the combat area was divided into two: the forward area and the back area. The back area was classified as any area through which an advance had already passed and was not under observation or shell fire. These areas were to be cleared by the Labour

⁵⁵ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Volume 4045 Folder 3 File 4 – Burials and Cemeteries– 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade, 1st Canadian Division. “AQ 4085 – Instructions Regarding the Disposal of Dead Bodies on the Battlefield,” August 1916 (13 September 1916).

⁵⁶ In this case, it was deemed better to bury soldiers in a mass grave than to attempt to create an isolated cemetery. Further, these types of burials were later dug up and reinterred through Graves Concentration units towards the end of the war.

Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ The General Order also mentions the storage of quicklime and how precautions should be taken so that it does not blow about, thus affecting the eyes of the living. Ibid.

Company.⁵⁹ The front area was classified as an area after an advance, an assault that had failed, or a withdrawal. These areas were to be cleared according to divisional arrangements in coordination with the Corps Burial officer. Unlike the back area, which maintained established cemeteries far behind the front lines, the front area required a set of procedures to be followed. First, cemeteries were to be laid out in intervals along the front and were to be easily accessible by railway or horse transport and were not to be within observation range of the enemy. Further, under no circumstance were isolated burials to be used. Deposition points were organized for the consolidation of bodies and were under the supervision of the Divisional Burial Officer. Further, bodies were transported to the deposition points by the Royal Artillery, Corps troops, and medical units. Finally, effects were only to be removed by the officer or non-commissioned officer in charge of the cemetery.⁶⁰

2.5 Overhauling Burial Practices – The Continual Evolution of Burials During the First World War

Starting in the latter part of 1915, circular messages were sent by military officials to the commanding officers of units in the British and Dominion armies, which informed how burials were to proceed. These circular messages were a result of the earlier creation of the Graves Registration Commission, which had begun to formalize burial practices, but, more importantly, also notified commanders about the merger of the GRC into the military. Reminders and stricter orders were being issued to Corps and Divisional

⁵⁹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C5 Box 4361 Folder 1 File 15 CRE Corps Troops Cemeteries (Pickets for marking graves, Criticism re designs for tombstones, procedure re burial of the dead) 26/12/1917 to 22/3/1918, "XIII Corps Burial Instructions: Part II: Heavy Fighting," 20 March 1918.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Commanders to supply dead soldiers' particulars to the DAG Office. An order from 19 November 1915 was sent to the DAG (Canadian Section) from the Canadian Records Office requesting that formal orders be inserted into the Corps and Divisional Orders issued to the respective commanders. These orders required commanders to submit burial reports and Army forms to the records office as applicable. Such information included the number of graves in a recognised cemetery, a map location of the cemetery, an exact map location for soldiers buried in the field, and a report on the steps taken to mark the graves.⁶¹ These orders were later formalized in the Field Service Regulations, Part 11 Section 133 (3, 4, and 5) by 24 December 1915.⁶² There was no British standard practice for determining the location of burials until the latter months of 1915.

The established policy had been that soldiers were buried where they fell. However, by December 1915, a flurry of memos were released regarding soldiers evacuated to England. Early procedural measures allowed for soldiers who perished in seaports to be evacuated to Britain, and, theoretically, to Canada as well, although there are no records to indicate that the latter happened due to the short period that evacuations occurred. In memo A. Q. 893 to the Canadian Engineers dated 3 December 1915, Captain F. B. Ware explained that those who perished in seaports could be transported back to England for burial. Ware, however, stressed that all who perished away from seaports must be buried where they fell.⁶³ Although A. Q. 893 was sent in December 1915, it was repealed shortly thereafter

⁶¹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 1266, File G-2-5 Volume 1 – Graves Procedure – 3rd Echelon, “Circular Extract from Office i/c Records to DAG (Canadian Section),” 19 November 1915.

⁶² LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 1266, File G-2-5 Volume 1 – Graves Procedure – 3rd Echelon, “K.971 – Lt. Col of DAAG to Headquarters – Canadian Corps – BEF,” 24 December 1915.

⁶³ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C5 Box 4401 Folder 1 File 20 – Casualties – 3rd Canadian Field Coy, CE 20-9-15 to 26-6-17, “AQ 895 – Letter from F.B. Ware,” 3 December 1915.

by memo A. C. 831, dated 31 December 1915. This memo specified that Canadian officials were to abide by French desires to restrict the removal of any body from French territory.⁶⁴

The lack of a clear burial policy was also evident in France. In September 1915, for example, the French Ministry of War restricted the removal of bodies from France. Memo S.C. 811 explained that French and British military officials came up with the idea to help relatives both cope with and understand the inability to return the remains of lost family members. Specifically, it was believed that relatives would be distressed by any problems that arose through an application process to have bodies returned to Britain. Thus, by stating that bodies could not be returned, French authorities believed this would alleviate any anxiety over the entire process.⁶⁵ Although this was a meaningful sentiment to reduce relatives' anxiety, the unspoken truth was the immense logistical problem that the Entente nations would have faced with any large-scale repatriation efforts.⁶⁶ Moreover, even burying soldiers in French territory proved problematic at the start of the war. Quite simply, at the beginning of the war the Entente powers were not prepared for the type of warfare they were to face. As such, there was an immediate need to overhaul burial policy as evidenced by the confusion around bringing bodies back to Britain.

By 1916, substantial changes were being implemented by British military authorities regarding how soldiers were buried, who was involved with the burials, and the

⁶⁴ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4043 Folder 1 File 5 – Burials and Cemeteries – 4th Canadian Infantry Battalion, 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade, “A.C. 831 – Letter from Staff Captain of 1st Canadian Infantry Bde,” 31 December 1915.

⁶⁵ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4043 Folder 1 File 5 – Burials and Cemeteries – 4th Canadian Infantry Battalion, 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade, “S.C. 811 – Letter from Staff Captain of 1st Canadian Infantry Bde, 4 December 1915.

⁶⁶ In fact, the United States attempted to repatriate its soldiers after it entered the war in 1917 and ran into significant problems including loss of bodies, incomplete bodies, or wrong bodies being sent to the wrong families.

Lisa Budreau, *Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 76-77.

duties of officers and men to report burials. This was mainly accomplished by military officials re-emphasizing the need to follow previously established procedures when possible. The goal was to alleviate some of the problems the army had faced regarding burials, burial reports, marking graves, and damage to cemeteries and graves. Initially, attempts started with the role of the chaplains. 1st Canadian Divisional Routine Order 609 re-affirmed that they were to forward a weekly return of those who had fallen for all burials they attended.⁶⁷ Moreover, a memorandum to the Canadian battalions dated 4 July 1916 reiterated that every attempt should be made to ensure that a chaplain attended *all* burials.⁶⁸

By December 1916, further orders were given through a circular memorandum dated 16 December 1916. The memorandum, circulated to the 2nd Canadian Division, explained that chaplains had been forced to identify and register graves of soldiers in some of the Canadian divisions. As such, the memorandum also outlined that “chaplains should not be ordered to carry out this [identifying and registering graves] work. It is realised that these orders were given in order to assist the Graves Registration Committee and if any chaplain will help to undertake this work there is no objection to their doing so.”⁶⁹ The memo continued by introducing the notion of unmarked graves, noting that “if burial returns had been rendered there should have been no unmarked graves in positions which are accessible.” The order requested that each Division be instructed to provide a list of prepared graves to the officer in charge of Graves Registration Units so the graves could

⁶⁷ LAC, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24 Box 1860 – Cummings Monographs WW1, File 60 – Casualties, “Extracts from: 1st Canadian Division Routine Orders – 609. Chaplains,” 24 June 1916.

⁶⁸ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4036, Folder 1 File 12 – 3rd Canadian Infantry Battalion, 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade – Burials & Cemeteries – March 1915 – February 1917, “Circular Message – Rof 35-44,” 4 July 1916.

⁶⁹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C6 Box 4453. Folder 1 File 20 – 2nd Canadian Pioneer Battalion Burials and Cemeteries (16/12/1916 to 20/2/1918). “Circular memorandum A-32-62 from Major K. L. Hughes,” 16 December 1916.

properly be marked. While not significant changes, the continual reiteration of previously established policies demonstrates problems the army faced due to fighting conditions on the front.

While the army continued to re-issue existing orders to emphasize the need to follow burial procedures, it also addressed some of the poor conditions that had been detrimental to soldiers being able to bury and record graves. One of the most significant was the institution of the Corps and Divisional Burial Officers, an idea spawned by a meeting that Fabian Ware had at Fourth Army Headquarters in 1916. Ware expressed concern about the lack of a proper organization charged with burying the dead after an action. During the Somme, he explained, it would be impossible to institute a proper organization due to the severe fighting. Moreover, Ware was also concerned that if bodies were not buried it would impact the morale of both soldiers and civilians back in Britain, as well as his work of registering the graves. It was soon after this meeting that the Corps and Divisional Burial Officer positions were created to take over the administration of burials.⁷⁰ By March 1917, the establishment of the Corps and Divisional Burial Officer positions was noted in a circular message from the headquarters of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade. It stated that instructions had been received from the Canadian Corps that an officer would be designated the Divisional Burial Officer and be appointed in charge of the burial of the dead from that Division after an action. Moreover, it noted that the Divisional Burial Officer would work under the instruction of the Corps Burial Officer,

⁷⁰ CWGC Archives, Box DGRE 1 – 19 (SDC 4), Folder DGRE 1 – Narrative Letters and Reports, “Correspondence Fabian Ware to Captain Cornock Taylor – DGR&E,” 29 June 1917.

which held similar responsibilities, but at the Corps level.⁷¹ This message also denoted the responsibilities of each division when it came to burials. Each division was to provide a party of sixty O.R. (Other Ranks) to be supervised by the Divisional Officer. Moreover, each battalion was to provide a party of five O.R. to supply the larger divisional party. In addition, according to historian Duff Crerar, at least two chaplains were attached to each divisional party searching the fields for dead soldiers.⁷² The burial party was to be left with their unit until ground needed to be prepared for cemeteries.⁷³ The exception to remaining with their unit was when a division was being withdrawn after an action. In this case, the Divisional Burial Officer would remain along with the necessary men from the burial party until burial of the dead from was completed.⁷⁴

Overall, the institution of the Corps and Divisional Burial Officers was quite forward-thinking. In addition to denoting responsibilities to the burial officers, each division was also required to select and prepare a cemetery in its front area. The cemetery was to be fifty yards square, staked out, and, if necessary, fenced off so that it could be used in the future. The burial officers were also to mark any graves in each cemetery, collect the personnel effects of the dead, and render the burial returns from each cemetery.⁷⁵ By stipulating clear instructions to each division, there was less confusion over the roles and responsibilities for burials. Furthermore, since cemeteries were to be clearly marked, enclosed, and a certain length, better planning could be undertaken for the burial of dead

⁷¹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4045, Folder 3 File 4 – 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade, 1st Canadian infantry Division – Burials and Cemeteries (6-7-16 to 27-2-18), “Circular message A. Q. 52-93 from Staff Captain – 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade,” 9 March 1917.

⁷² Crerar, *Padres in No Man’s Land*, 121.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C6 Box 4453, Folder 1 File 20 – 2nd Canadian Pioneer Battalion – Burials and Cemeteries (16/12/1916 to 20/2/1918), “Canadian Corps Circular Message – A-53-1-2,” 7 March 1917.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

after an offensive. Finally, by tying personal effects and returns to certain cemeteries instead of map locations, there was an even better chance that bodies would not be lost.

The establishment of the Corps and Divisional Burial Officers drastically improved the effectiveness of burials on the battlefield. Officers became an important liaison between burial parties and the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries. An example of this effectiveness can be seen with the offensive at Vimy Ridge. Within twenty-four hours of the offensive in April 1917, all graves had been dug, marked, and recorded. This was an extraordinary feat, especially since a Canadian Burial Officer was killed in one of the burial sectors.⁷⁶ Further instructions regarding the burial of soldiers were issued following the fighting at Vimy Ridge on 20 April 1917. These instructions only slightly modified the original ideas set forth in the Corps and Divisional Burial Officer scheme. Notable items included reminding units that they were responsible for the burial of their own as well as enemy dead in the area in which they had fought. Further, it reminded burial parties that all men buried outside of cemeteries should have their graves marked with a disc and be registered as would typically be done.⁷⁷ One reason for the success was that chaplains and burial officers took a professional pride in ensuring the burial of soldiers and clearly the battlefield was effectively completed after the attack on Vimy Ridge. Memories of the Somme burial fiasco were still fresh in soldiers' memories.⁷⁸

Subsequent documentation from the 3rd Echelon suggested that even further fine-tuning was done at the end of April 1917. In Canadian Corps Order A.53-1-9, a more

⁷⁶ "The Imperial War Graves Commission," *Times* [London, England] 10 Nov. 1928: vi-vii, *The Times Digital Archive*, Web, 23 Aug. 2016.

⁷⁷ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 883, File B-2-3 Volume 3 (Burials, Funerals, and Cemeteries Volume 3), "Circular Message Q/S/C 9 -3rd Canadian Division from Captain G. G. Blackstock," 20 April 1917.

⁷⁸ Crerar, *Padres in No Man's Land*, 338.

complete guideline was provided outlining the duties starting at the end of an advance to the movement toward the next assignment. Originally published at the end of March 1917, the updated April version stipulated that Divisional Officers would determine the arrangements for clearing a battlefield of bodies during the advance. The work would be completed by the Labour Company, which was attached to the Corps Registration Officer. The work would only be completed in sections where the advance had already passed, up to the location of the Brigade Headquarters.⁷⁹

Following the clearing of battlefields, the Divisional Officer would arrange for plots to be laid out in cemeteries. The cemeteries could be used for burials of a division, brigade, or battalion, depending on the circumstances of the advance. The order, as with previous ones, also stipulated that each unit was responsible for burying its own dead. Following the burials, or as soon as was practical, the Corps Registration Officer would open the Corps Cemetery to allow for transport into and out of the cemetery. At this point, as many bodies as possible would be transported to the cemetery from the divisional areas. The cemetery would also be made known to all Divisions of the Canadian Corps. Finally, graves registration personnel would be allowed to carry out all of their routine duties. The order also included strict guidelines for cemeteries that were operated by graves registration personnel, and for the requirements of officers and men assigned to a burial party.⁸⁰ In a correspondence to the Canadian Corps, it was noted that graves were to be left

⁷⁹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 1266, File G-2-5 (G-2-5 Graves Procedure, 3rd Ech), "Canadian Corps Order A.53-1-9," 25 April 1917.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

open in all cemeteries by the burial parties. These graves were only to be filled in by the divisional burial party.⁸¹

By August 1917, burial policy throughout the front was well established for British and Canadian troops. On 8 August 1917, Circular Memorandum No. 43, titled “Cemeteries and the Burial of the Dead,” was sent throughout the British and Dominion armies. The memorandum touched on the establishment of cemeteries, conveyance of bodies to the cemeteries, and burial of the dead. Though the majority of the memorandum reiterated previous routine orders, which were still active, there also appears to be some slight modifications. For example, in cases when heavy fighting was known to have occurred, Corps and Divisional Burial Officers were appointed to see that burial parties received proper instructions as to the arrangements that would be needed after the fighting. Moreover, the memorandum outlined the working partnership between the Corps Burial Officers and the Corps Registration Officer to ensure identification of deceased soldiers.⁸² Most of Memorandum 43 was a republished version of the previous routine orders stipulating burial policies. Since there were minimal changes, Memorandum 43 shows a more coherent and finalized burial policy toward the end of 1917. This is especially so since burial policies only really went through minor changes following the introduction of the Corps and Divisional Burial Officers at the start of 1917.

Over the next year, correspondence and circular memoranda were sent throughout the Canadian Corps dealing with burial policy. With the exception of minor variances due

⁸¹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C4 Box 4301, Folder 2 file 11 – 6th Brigade CFA Burials (26/7/1916 to 26/12/1918), “Correspondence to the CRA 2nd Canadian Division from F. Homer Dixon,” 8 July 1917.

⁸² LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4099, Folder 3 File 6 – 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade 2nd Canadian Infantry Division – Burials & Cemeteries (10/10/15 to 31/10/18), “First Army Circular Memorandum No. 43 – Cemeteries and the Burial of the Dead,” 8 August 1917.

to specific regions or advances, these messages simply reiterated the established burial policy from 1917. Thus, by the end of 1917, the majority of burial policy was finalized. Not surprisingly, it took British and Dominion officials three years of warfare to establish a coherent burial plan for their troops.

2.6 Official and Unofficial Cemeteries – Redefining Burials During War

As the British military slowly started to shift away from the use of mass graves and burials, new policies and procedures were required to determine what was to happen to a body after death. Previously, mass burials were carried out using old trench lines or shell holes; however, as individual graves began to replace mass burials, parameters were required to clarify what these graves should look like. Furthermore, the alternative practice of burying a soldier in either French or Belgian churchyards or in Communal Cemeteries could not be continued. These types of plots were rapidly filling up, causing concern amongst French and Belgian civil authorities.⁸³ As such, negotiations were opened with France to secure burial land and to mitigate the burden of finding it for military casualties and civilian burials.

To secure land for military cemeteries, Fabian Ware negotiated with French authorities in 1915. Although these negotiations went smoothly, the French authorities did have stipulations: the British must take responsibility for their own cemeteries; cemeteries were not to be too large, nor were they to be within a certain distance of towns and villages; the cemeteries had to be accessible by a public road; and they had to be in close proximity to medical aid stations. In addition, the French mandated that the distance between graves

⁸³ "The Imperial War Graves Commission." *Times* [London, England] 10 Nov. 1928: vi. *The Times Digital Archive*. Web. 23 Aug. 2016.

be twenty-three to thirty centimetres, while the width of the paths between graves could not exceed ninety centimetres.⁸⁴

It is important to note that by the end of 1915 the Graves Registration Commission (GRC) had not only been established as a joint military-civilian organization, but was in the process of being absorbed into the Adjutant-General's Branch. After one year of warfare, British authorities realized the need to formalize burials and grave registration more so than had been done in the past. At this time, negotiations were ongoing between the British and the French to secure land that would later become cemeteries. Prior to this, burials were conducted where and when possible. For example, there were cases of soldiers being buried in French municipal cemeteries, in farmers' fields, in the gardens at the back of small cottages, or in pasture fields.⁸⁵ When time permitted, bodies were in fact collected and placed in military cemeteries, but these needed the blessing of the local French Prefects and the Conseil Départemental d'Hygiène.⁸⁶

While the GRC was being transferred to military hands, General Routine Order (GRO) 1104 was sent to British and Dominion soldiers. This GRO stipulated the unofficially-agreed upon procedures for burying bodies in France and for the creation of cemeteries. In cases where time permitted, French authorities could be consulted. If these authorities agreed, then the cemetery and burial could go ahead. In cases where French officials had already accepted a cemetery, burials could continue until the cemetery was full. Moreover, the French bill did not outline the procedure in cases where French

⁸⁴ Geurst, *Cemeteries of the Great War* By Sir Edwin Lutyens, 13.

⁸⁵ CWGC Archives, Folder MU 1, Narrative Letters and Reports, "Untitled Report – R. A. L. Broadley," 6 December 1914.

⁸⁶ CWGC Archives, Box DGRE 1 – 19 (SDC 4), Folder DGRE 2 – Land in France, Provision of. "Report – Graves Registration Commission," 29 August 1915.

Municipal Prefects no longer existed because of the war.⁸⁷ Unfortunately, the General Routine Order made no reference to what was to happen in cases where there was not enough time to consult French officials. Thus, GRO 1104 created a dilemma: the potential for burials to take place in unsanctioned or unapproved cemeteries. These types of cemeteries later became known as temporary or emergency cemeteries and were considered unofficial.

GRO 1104 was put in place due to the pending passage of the French Law of Appropriation for Burials, also known as the French Law of 1915.⁸⁸ The law allowed for the expropriation of French lands to be used as British cemeteries during the war and in perpetuity. In exchange, the British were required to notify French authorities of pending cemeteries and to receive approval for the construction of the cemeteries. Further, bodies buried in these cemeteries were nationalized as French, so repatriation of remains was not permitted under the French law. The law outlined a perfect scenario for burying soldiers on the front. However, the front itself proved to be an imperfect situation for burials. Heavy fighting, no-man's-land, and continuing advances made the task of burying soldiers even more difficult. As such, burials in unofficial, non-recognized, or emergency cemeteries were conducted.⁸⁹

In November 1915, the Graves Registration Commission sent a memorandum detailing the use of cemeteries that outlined two courses of action for burials: officers and men were either buried in a cemetery in a numbered grave, or they were buried on the

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ The law is also referred to as the French Law, the Law for Providing Lands for the Burial of British Soldiers in France, the French December Law, and the French Law of 1915.

⁸⁹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4171, Folder 1 File 16 4th CMR Battalion 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade Burials and Cemeteries 16/5/1916 – 30/7/1917, “Memorandum A. 38.2 to Canadian Corp – 3rd Canadian Division,” 8 July 1916.

battlefield in some form of temporary grave. For soldiers buried in cemeteries, maps were not issued to next of kin since each soldier was buried in a numbered grave and the detailed plans were kept with the cemetery. As such, these graves were readily identified by the permanent markings.⁹⁰ Despite this, the GRC gave no mention of how these cemeteries were determined. The memorandum demonstrates a coherent policy set up for burials in cemeteries. Previously, burials were conducted where there was adequate space, typically an old trench or in shell holes. Further, the memorandum specifies numbered graves instead of the use of mass graves, representative of the shift away from the use of mass graves.

The first Canadian burials in cemeteries were not recorded until 9 November 1915, in a field book of an officer from the 2nd Canadian Infantry Battalion, 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade.⁹¹ Why were burials not recorded until November when Canadian troops had been used in active combat since March? The likely reason for the gap is because record-keeping was sporadic during the period. It was not until the end of 1915 and beginning of 1916 that complete information was documented about Canadian burials and registration.

Throughout 1916, memorandums were sent to the Canadian Corps detailing the use of emergency cemeteries and unauthorized use of unofficial cemeteries. In June 1916, Captain Chettle of the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries sent a memorandum to the 3rd Echelon detailing unauthorised cemeteries. Chettle explained that the list “should not be taken as definite, the names used being only given temporarily in

⁹⁰ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 1147, File R-191-4 – Procedure Re Graves Registration (RR 3-13 Volume 1), “Correspondence from Officer i/c A2 to DAG – Canadian Record Office,” 17 November 1915. Appendix: Memorandum re Registration of Graves and Supply of Information to Next of Kin.

⁹¹ The record itself simply states that Private Pigot, H. Y. regimental number 15231 was buried in the Second Battalion Cemetery on 9 November 1915. His grave was well marked, but the book provides no grave details.

LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4034, Folder 2 Books 3-4, “Book No. 3 – Correspondences and Operations – 5-10-15 to 15-12-15,” 9 November 1915.

order to distinguish one group from another, which may be quite close by.” He further noted that “it is impossible to name and number correctly, many of those scattered groups of graves, and it must be noted that the names which are given to some will not be adhered to after the cessation of hostilities.”⁹² Another memorandum was sent throughout the Canadian Corps that specified which cemeteries were unauthorized or unofficial, and which were only to be used in emergency situations. Sent from Lieutenant-Colonel W.B. Anderson of the Quartermaster General, Canadian Corps, the memo stipulated that Maple Copse, Sanctuary Wood, Lankhoff, and Gordon Farm cemeteries were not to be used. Moreover, Anderson stipulated that there were cemeteries that could be used in emergency situations; however, these cemeteries were unofficial and the preference was to take bodies to authorized burial grounds. The cemeteries that Anderson listed as emergency included Chester Farm, Voormezele, Wood Cemetery, and Spoilbank.⁹³ Anderson finished his memo by explaining that the Corps commander desired that every effort should be made to bury bodies in recognized cemeteries. Although there was a strong aspiration to avoid the use of isolated graves, Anderson contended that there were sometimes urgent needs, and that if an isolated grave was required for a burial, special care needed to be taken to mark the grave, record the map location, and ensure the proper identification procedure was followed.⁹⁴

A letter from Lieutenant-Colonel H.W.B, officer in charge of records for the Canadian Expeditionary Force to the Secretary of the Militia Council, highlighted the

⁹² LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 1203, File C-19-5 Volume 1 – Cemeteries – Re-list of Register – 3rd Echelon, “Correspondence: Captain Chettle to AAG – Canadian Section – 3rd Echelon,” 24 June 1916.

⁹³ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4171, Folder 1 File 16 4th CMR Battalion 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade Burials and Cemeteries 16/5/1916 – 30/7/1917, “Canadian Corps Circular Message: A. 38.2,” 8 July 1916.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

practice of distributing maps to next-of-kin after burial. H.W.B outlined that as of March 1916, the 1:40 000 map would no longer be issued. The War Office correctly believed that the 1:40 000 maps “are useless for identifying a grave with a view of visiting it after the war, and should not be offered to next-of-kin, but should only be sent in response to special applications.” Further, Lieutenant-Colonel H.W.B’s letter also stipulated that

the maps have been used in the main for indicating graves outside registered military cemeteries. The withdrawal of these maps, therefore, is not so important as would appear, as the practice of burying soldiers outside military cemeteries is not general. In a few isolated cases, owing to the exigencies of the military situation then prevailing, i.e., Ypres and Givenchy, soldiers have been buried in the field, and the graves either unmarked or marked by improvised crosses or bottle markers. Locations are being obtained and recorded as far as possible, but as such graves are usually close to the firing line, it has been possible for the officers of the Graves registration Commission to visit the spot with a view of erecting permanent markers. In all probability, all traces of many of these graves have been, or will be obliterated by shell fire.⁹⁵

The letter outlined Canadian public concern with the British War Office decision, resulting in a contingency plan in this event. As such, Lieutenant-Colonel H.W.B explained that 1:100 000 scale maps would be issued, since the 1:40 000 would practically be useless after the war. Further, the maps would only be issued if they were specifically requested.⁹⁶ This was also the same time period in which official cemeteries were being discussed and established.

Due to the nature of temporary cemeteries and isolated burial plots, the need for official cemeteries soon became urgent. A communiqué within the 3rd Canadian Battalion

⁹⁵ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 1147, File: R-191-4 (Procedure Re Graves Registration). “i/c N. 13316, Correspondence from Officer i/c Records, Canadian Expeditionary Force,” 13 March, 1916.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

details the establishment of official burial grounds for each brigade.⁹⁷ Despite the establishment of official burial grounds, soldiers were repeatedly forced to use temporary cemeteries throughout the war, typically due to heavy fighting. A memo dated 30 June 1916 from the 4th Canadian Mounted Rifles outlined various burial regulations and procedures that had been circulated Corps wide. It specifically explained that “units are again urged to take every possible care, and make every effort to remove the bodies of those who have been killed in action to authorized Military Cemeteries, as far in the rear of the frontline as possible.”⁹⁸ The purpose of this memo was twofold. First, it addressed the fact that unauthorized cemeteries close to the front were continually being damaged by enemy shell fire, as was the case with the Maple Copse and Sanctuary Wood cemeteries. Although strongly recommending that bodies be returned to rear cemeteries, the memo confessed that at times this would not be possible. Despite this, the memo sought to instil personal connection to the families of fallen soldiers by stating that “for the sake of the friends and families of those who fall at the front, it is hoped that no pains will be spared to bury the remains in a permanent resting place, which friends may be able to identify after the termination of the war.”⁹⁹ Such a sense of camaraderie was common throughout the First World War.

Despite the desire to move bodies to the rear, even in 1916 this could not always happen. A memo from Captain H. F. Chettle dated 1 October 1916 gives reference to cases

⁹⁷ Although earlier cemeteries certainly existed before this memo was sent to the Canadian Corps, this section is dealing with Canadian cemeteries.

LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4036, Folder 1 File 12 (3rd Canadian Infantry Battalion, 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade: Burials & Cemeteries – March, 1915 – February 1917), “1st Canadian Brigade communiqué A.C. 581,” 15 March 1916.

⁹⁸ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4171, Folder 1 File 16 – Burials and Cemeteries – 4th C.M.R. Battalion, 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade, “Correspondence: A.38.2,” 30 June 1916.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

when, due to heavy fighting, the removal of bodies to the rear was simply not possible. The memo was written following the Second Battle of Ypres and recent fighting in the Ypres Salient, and explained that “during this period it was impossible for Battalions to bury their own men, and although many of the dead were buried we have no trace of any reports from the burial parties showing positions of their graves.”¹⁰⁰ The memo also quoted the 13th Canadian Battalion as stating that “we have every reason to believe that [deceased soldiers] were buried, not by men of this unit, but by a special party that is always detailed for such duties.”¹⁰¹ The reference to ‘special party’ either refers to a special burial party established to search for and bury bodies or to the mobile burial units attached to each level of the military. This is more plausible since by October 1916, mobile burial units were a common practice.

Later memos from the 4th Canadian Mounted Rifles show that there were still many accounts of bodies being buried either in unauthorized cemeteries or cemeteries that were too close to the front lines, which were also unauthorized cemeteries. Attempts by Canadian military officials were made to prevent bodies being buried too close to the front. In a 3rd Canadian Division memo, reference Q.S.C.9, dated 30 September 1917, Captain G.G. Blackstock of the 3rd Canadian Division explained that “the Light Railway running from ‘Vickers Ammunition Dump’ to the railway at T.19.b.8.3. should be used to convey bodies to the rear as far as ‘Peggy Dump’ where they will be taken over by the Divisional Burial Officer and conveyed to a rear cemetery for burial.”¹⁰² The memo concluded that

¹⁰⁰ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4171, Folder 1 File 16 – Burials and Cemeteries – 4th C.M.R. Battalion, 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade, “War Office, London, E. C. 1-10-16,” 1 October 1916.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4171, Folder 1 File 16 – Burials and Cemeteries – 4th C.M.R. Battalion, 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade, “Memo: Q.S.C.9,” 30 September 1917.

remains should only be buried at the front in cases where it was absolutely essential, and that every attempt should be made to send bodies to the rear of the front.¹⁰³

By the time proper cemeteries were established in 1917, procedures regarding treatment of the body upon burial were starting to be standardized. On 17 April 1917, the Canadian Corps sent circular A.53-1-9 outlining how bodies were to be treated after death. The circular superseded all previous instructions on burials and offered a concrete set of rules to be followed. First, it dictated that during an advance the clearing of bodies would be done as soon as possible under direction of the divisional arrangement and the Corps Registration officer.¹⁰⁴ Next it explained that burial plots should be dug as soon as available; the plots could be used by a division, brigade, or battalion depending on the circumstances of the battle and the circumstances of death. These plots would then be ‘opened’ into a Corps cemetery by the Corps Registration Officer as time permitted. As soon as the cemetery was established, bodies from each divisional area would be transported to the cemetery to centralize the burials.¹⁰⁵ The memo closed by explaining that the body would be moved to a selected plot within the Corps cemetery. Effects, badges, and tags would be put in a numbered bag and placed at the head of the grave. Burial officers would then note the details of the grave and soldier on a duplicate sheet. These details included the serial number of the grave, number, rank, name, and map location. A copy of this report was added to the personal effects bag while the other copy was sent with the

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4197, Folder 1 File 10 (Burials and Cemeteries – 58th Canadian Infantry Battalion, 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade, 1-5-16 to 18-7-18), “Circular: A.53-1-9 from Captain W J A Bovey,” 17 April 1917.

¹⁰⁵ If bodies were buried outside of a Corps cemetery, then it was the responsibility of the burial party to make sufficient recording of the grave and that the documents are sent in a timely manner to registration officers.

Ibid.

personal effects back to divisional headquarters. Later, additional copies were sent to the 3rd Echelon headquarters, the DGR&E, and the “A” Branch of the Canadian Corps.¹⁰⁶

Further directives were sent as reminders throughout the war and provided detailed additions to burial policy. An example can be found in memo A-53-1-59 sent to the 28th Canadian Infantry Battalion, 6th Infantry Brigade in October 1917. Upon burying soldiers’ remains, the burial party was expected to place any effects into a ration bag to be returned to the unit from which the soldier had served. The body was then to be wrapped in green canvas with a tag detailing number, rank, name and unit. Next, the chaplain was instructed to carry out the burial. Notice of the burial was to be sent to the Corps Burial Officer so that labour could be supplied for digging the graves.¹⁰⁷

When digging graves for either permanent or temporary cemeteries, corps labourers were required to ensure that graves were a standard size. Graves needed to be at two feet wide by six feet six inches long. Although the use of green canvas did not impact burials, family, friends, or comrades sometimes requested that the remains be buried in a certain fashion, or with specific markers. Any requests made, including those for a box or coffin, had to fall within the standardized grave dimensions.¹⁰⁸

In some cases, a small number of graves were segregated from the rest in the cemetery. An inspection report written by Sir Lionel Earle in April 1916 discusses this practice. Earle was a member of the International War Graves Committee and in his report he noted groups of two or three graves that had been isolated from the rest, as well as those

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4137, Folder 1 File 18 – Burials and Cemeteries – 28th Canadian Infantry Battalion, 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade, “Circular: A-53-1-59,” 19 October 1917.

¹⁰⁸ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4045, Folder 3 File 3 – 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade – 1st Canadian Division – Burials and Cemeteries, “Circular Memorandum: A.Q. 28-7,” 6 July 1916.

wooden crosses that contained no details. After he pressed the military authorities about the reasoning behind this, Earle was informed that the isolated graves were those of men executed for cowardice. Earle believed that since these men had paid the ultimate sacrifice, they should not be separated. Thus, Earle submitted a report to the War Cabinet in Britain, which led to the abolition of segregating those executed for cowardice from the rest of the soldiers.¹⁰⁹ Though none of the graves appear to have been Canadian, it is still important to mention due to the fact that the War Cabinet was in control of military cemeteries in early 1916. As such, British practices of segregating men executed for cowardice would have been applied to Commonwealth armies. Thus, it is possible that British practices of segregating men could have affected Canadian soldiers.

2.7 Away from the Front – Military Burials in the United Kingdom

Burials on the front received more attention from British military officials because soldiers who returned home either on leave or wounded often complained about the state of battlefields and the burial of bodies.¹¹⁰ Not all burials, however, were conducted on the front. For example, wounded soldiers who were evacuated to Britain after an offensive and later died still needed to be buried. So too did soldiers who died in Britain from training accidents or disease. These burials appear to have been less of a concern to military officials, because the number of these burials was dwarfed by the number of burials that were required on an active front.

¹⁰⁹ Crane, *Empire of the Dead: How One Man's Vision led to the Creation of WWI's War Graves*, 88.

¹¹⁰ CWGC Archives, Box DGRE 1 – 19 (SDC 4), Folder DGRE 1 – Narrative Letters and Reports, “Correspondence Fabian Ware to Captain Cornock Taylor – DGR&E,” 29 June 1917.

Burials in Britain were conducted in a much different environment than burials on the front. These burials could be done at any time and did not suffer from the same constraints as burials in France. As such, official policy was more distinct. By 1915, burials that took place in Britain were mostly done in military cemeteries. These cemeteries were required to have blueprints on file and military photographers on hand to photograph the graves in each cemetery.¹¹¹ These types of burials continued into 1916, albeit with minor changes. A document from April 1916 made clear that soldiers who perished in military hospitals were buried in military cemeteries unless their relatives requested otherwise. A register of all interments was kept by the Commanding Royal Engineer of the District in which the Military Cemetery was located, which recorded the name of the deceased along with the date of interment, the officiating chaplain, and the position of the grave.¹¹² Although the majority of burials happened in military cemeteries, there were still many military personnel being buried in civilian cemeteries in Britain. In these cases, the grave was to be registered by the authorities or clergyman in charge of the cemetery. Moreover, the military deemed itself not responsible for registering graves in civil cemeteries.¹¹³

Although burials proceeded much more smoothly in Britain than in France, the British also encountered procedural problems. Problems tended to arise more commonly with civilian authorities than military authorities. One example of this was when the cost of buying a plot or burial of the body was passed down to relatives. In a letter from Stanley J. Attenborough to the Chief Paymaster of the Canadian Contingent, Attenborough

¹¹¹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 1147, File: R-191-4 (Procedure Re Graves Registration), "Circular: R.L.-26-7. 1215," 9 December, 1915.

¹¹² LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 1147, File: R-191-4 (Procedure Re Graves Registration), "45/E.F./2098 – Letter to Captain Sellon from C.F. Watherston," 11 April, 1916.

¹¹³ Ibid.

outlined the costs he incurred to bury his son. Attenborough had to make two purchases when he buried his son: the plot of land in Lincoln Cemetery and the placement of a memorial on his own land. Attenborough asserted that he was charged double fees for both purchases because his son was not a resident of Lincoln.¹¹⁴ Although isolated, such examples show how military and civilian authorities were not prepared to accept the number of burials required because of the war.

Personal plots were not the only benefits of being buried in Britain over being buried in France. Correspondence also confirms that burials in Britain used regular coffins. In a letter from the Chief Paymaster of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) dated 27 January 1915, concern was raised that those who had died in Britain had been buried in ordinary, unlined coffins. The Chief Paymaster ordered that lined coffins were to be used in the future.¹¹⁵ However, he stipulated that lined coffins were only to be used when the next-of-kin of the soldier was to be repatriated to either Canada or the United States, as they made transportation easier, and were typically requested by the families exhuming the bodies.¹¹⁶

Although lined coffins were used to allow for easier transportation should the body be exhumed and returned to Canada, burials on the Western Front were not often completed in this way. The use of coffins for initial burials appears to have been infrequent on the front, as soldiers had to have made a special request to be buried in a box or coffin prior to

¹¹⁴ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 1147, File: R-191-4 (Procedure Re Graves Registration), "Circular: P. L. 25a, 105," 16 November 1915.

¹¹⁵ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 1062, D-25-4 – Deceased Soldier – Conveyance of, "Correspondence between Chief Paymaster CEF and Secretary of Militia Council," 27 January 1915.

¹¹⁶ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 1062, D-25-4 – Deceased Soldier – Conveyance of, "Correspondences on Internments." 26 January 1915, 23 January 1915, and 18 January 1915.

their deployment overseas. This coffin also had to meet strict GRC guidelines as the size of grave plots were standardized.¹¹⁷ Again, the reasons for a more proper burial in Britain were profoundly related to the much easier circumstances that burial parties had when conducting burials than in France or Belgium.

Another chief difference between burials in France and in Britain related to funerals and funeral costs. Whereas front burials could be unceremoniously burying soldiers in old trenches or cemeteries, funerals were conducted with a marching band and various other ceremonies. Although there are little to no references of funerals being conducted in France, they did on occasion happen. However, there are many records relating to funerals being conducted for British and Canadian soldiers who perished in Britain. Geurst also highlighted funerals arranged for high-ranking officers, although no reference was made in Canadian documents to funerals in France or on the front.¹¹⁸

Reference to funerals for military personnel in Britain date back to the end of 1914. In a letter to the General Officers Commanding of all Home Commands, B. B. Cubitt referred to the conveyance of soldiers' bodies under certain conditions. These conditions included if the soldier perished as a result of active service and if the relatives of these soldiers desired a funeral to be held at his home. In these cases, the conveyance of the body to his home would be covered by Public Funds.¹¹⁹ Despite this, the letter made no more reference to the funerals taking place and, instead, focused on the cost of conveying a body.

¹¹⁷ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4045, Folder 3 File 3 – 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade – 1st Canadian Division – Burials and Cemeteries, “Circular Memorandum: A.Q. 28-7.” 6 July 1916.

¹¹⁸ Geurst, *Cemeteries of the Great War By Sir Edwin Lutyens*, 13.

¹¹⁹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 1062, D-25-4 – Deceased Soldier – Conveyance of, “Letter from B. B. Cubitt to Officers of the War Office,” 28 December 1914.

Instead, there were select instances where a funeral for a high-ranking officer was held in Britain. One example was the funeral of Lt. Colonel Strange, granted in January 1915. Division Order 816 requested pall bearers for the funeral, and Lt. Colonel Howard of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Infantry Brigade was dispatched to act as a pall bearer for the funeral.¹²⁰ Funerals and burial services offered a sense of closure to those who attended them. Historian Joanna Bourke explains that the trauma of death was greater in cases where a person was blown to pieces especially when on barbed wire, or was missing and presumed dead since there was no closure to the death.¹²¹ Further, historian David Cannadine notes that burying a body satisfied a sense of duty by ensuring that a comrade did not suffer such an indignity.¹²²

Other instances of funerals for military personnel in Britain were outlined in a letter to the Officer in Charge of Records, Canadian Contingent, dated 24 September 1915. The Officer in Charge of the Duchess of Connaught Canadian Red Cross Hospital alluded to funds made available for Canadian and British soldiers who died at a hospital. However, by this point the War Office had only allocated £1.15 to cover the expenses of Canadians dying at a hospital while £5 was allocated to British patients who died. British soldiers had originally been allocated the same amount as Canadian soldiers, but military funerals could not be conducted on the original £1.15 allocation.¹²³ As a result, the War Office increased

¹²⁰ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4034, Folder 1 File 4 – Burials – 2nd Canadian Infantry Battalion, 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade), “JLR. 24 – Letter to C. C. 2nd Battalion, Bustard Camp,” 8 January 1915.

¹²¹ Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face to Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare* (New York, Basic Books, 2000), 20-22.

¹²² David Cannadine, “War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain,” in *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death*, ed Joachim Whaley, (London, Europa Publications Limited, 1981), 210.

¹²³ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 1084, F-26-4 (Funeral Expenses), “Letter from Duchess of Connaught Hospital to Officer i/c Records – Canadian Contingent,” 24 September 1915.

the amount granted to British soldiers to £5 but neglected to increase the amount for Canadian soldiers. The purpose of the letter was to seek an increase in funds to be allocated to the burial of Canadian soldiers, thereby allowing for military funerals.¹²⁴

Public funds had other uses in addition to paying for interments in Britain. The funds were to pay for the cost of memorials at graves, the cost of buying grave plots, and the payment of fees to cemetery boards for the privilege of erecting memorials. Early documents showed an uncertainty as to what approach civilian cemetery boards would take to military burials in their respective cemeteries and whether or not those boards would enforce fees for burials and for the privilege of erecting memorials.¹²⁵

The way in which soldiers' graves were marked and registered in Britain was also different than in France. By February 1916, work was already well underway to mark and register the graves of soldiers in France, first by the British Red Cross Society (BRCS), and then by the civilian and military led Graves Registration Commission. However, marking and registering graves in Britain was quite different. Although the BRCS and the GRC completed a great deal of work in France and Belgium, their mandate and focus was still on the active front into 1916. As a result, a letter was written by Captain Sellon, which was an extension of a previous conversation about the possibility of organising a small committee for the purpose of marking, registering, and photographing Canadian graves in Britain. The idea was to follow along the same lines as the GRC in France.¹²⁶ The letter

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Volume 1147, File: R-191-4 (Procedure Re Graves Registration), "Minute Sheet. Memorandum Relative to the provisions from public funds for the purpose of marking Canadian soldiers' graves in the United Kingdom," 11 April 1916.

¹²⁶ Unfortunately, the letter is only initialed with no official title. Despite this, the letter is found in a collection of documents outlining the procedure for graves registration and was likely written either by a political or military official.

LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 1147, File: R-191-4 (Procedure Re Graves Registration), "Correspondence: To C. F. Watherston – War Office," 28 February 1916.

stipulated that Canadian soldiers who died in British hospitals were to be buried in various army towns. The committee would seek to ensure that suitable crosses were erected on each of these graves and that photographs of each grave were obtained and sent to relatives in Canada. Moreover, the author also sought to find out if similar procedures existed for British soldiers who were buried in Britain. Although he wanted to keep in line with how British soldiers were treated, he asserted that marking and photographing Canadian graves was important since Canadian relatives might not have adequate means to visit and maintain them.¹²⁷

Watherston's reply came on 11 April 1916. He explained that all soldiers who died in military hospitals in Britain were buried in military cemeteries. The exception to this was when the relatives desired alternative arrangements for burials. Moreover, Watherston clarified that the Commander of the Royal Engineer of the district where the military cemetery was located kept records of all military interments. Further, burials in civilian cemeteries had their graves registered by either the cemetery authority or, in cases of churchyard graves, by the concerned clergyman. Watherston attached a memorandum on the provision of public funds for the purpose of marking Canadian soldiers' graves in the United Kingdom.¹²⁸

The memorandum provided detailed questions and procedures on when to use public funds. It explained that in 1916 the cost of memorials could not be properly estimated. To rectify this, the committee handling memorials opted to govern suggestions it received and determine how much cash was allocated to the memorials based on the

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 1147, File R-191-4 (Procedure Re Graves Registration), "45/E.F./2098 – Letter to Captain Sellon from C.F. Watherston," 11 April 1916.

suggestions. Next, the memorandum explained that the average cost of buying graves could not be adequately determined since it would require “a large number of individual enquiries in order to eliminate the few cases where it may be necessary to purchase a grave.”¹²⁹ This suggests that, for the most part, by April 1916 the British army absorbed the cost of burying soldiers in military cemeteries. Next, the memorandum illustrated the hope that cemetery boards would not enforce any usual fees for memorials. However, in cases where the fee had to be paid, it was acceptable to pay out of public funds since the fees themselves were not significant.¹³⁰

Finally, the memo addressed the allocation of money to a Canadian Graves Memorial Committee in Britain. It explained that the amount of money allocated to burials was £10. If the expense after a funeral did not exceed £8, or exceeded £8, but not £10, then the difference was to be paid over to the committee. The money transferred to the Canadian Graves Memorial Committee was to be used for marking the graves of Canadian soldiers buried in Britain. Finally, the memorandum closed by explaining that the Canadian Red Cross Society also had funds for marking Canadian graves in Britain, if required.¹³¹

Toward the end of 1916, the suggestion of a central cemetery in Britain was raised. The idea was to have all remains of Canadian soldiers moved there; however, no real progress was made in dealing with Canadian burials in Britain. A War Council Memorandum from 17 October 1916 outlined the two problems affecting burials in Britain.

¹²⁹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 1147, File R-191-4 (Procedure Re Graves Registration), “45/E.F./2098 – Letter to Captain Sellon from C.F. Watherston – Appendix – Memorandum Relative to the Provision from Public Funds for the purpose of Marking Canadian Soldiers’ Graves in the United Kingdom,” 11 April 1916.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ The memorandum explained that by this point, relatives of soldiers had already marked some of the graves. Since this would cost the Commission no extra money, it was suggested that the money from these cases would be used to offset the cases where a funeral and burial had exceeded ten pounds. Ibid.

First, cemeteries in Britain were not properly subdivided, which impacted recordkeeping, as it was difficult to identify graves in some of the cemeteries. Second, military hospitals often did not send the required burial reports. As such, a great deal of work was required to follow up with burials performed in cemeteries.¹³² The memorandum also noted additional problems with the system as a whole. For instance, it made reference to the continued burial of soldiers in common graves. In some cases, ten to twelve soldiers could be buried in a single grave, rendering identification difficult. Moreover, it explained that local arrangements had not been made to attempt to keep graves together within cemeteries. As a result, military graves were scattered throughout their respective cemeteries. The only local arrangements that had been made by October 1916 were in Shorncliffe. A large part of this problem was due to the administration of burials in Britain. It was not the duty of the military department to deal with marking and burial of soldiers in Britain. Further, though the topic had been brought up on multiple occasions, no definitive chain of command had been established to fix this oversight.¹³³

In fact, military burials were disorganized. The memorandum noted that there were 522 Canadian graves registered in Britain. However, only 157 of these were marked. Moreover, some were only marked with temporary wooden crosses. Because of this, the memorandum discussed the practice of marking graves in France and the need for proper protocols for marking graves in Britain as well. Furthermore, it noted the potential public outrage at so many graves not being marked in Britain.¹³⁴

¹³² LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III Box 28, File 8-1-7 – Graves Registration, “Note – from Colonel Frank A. Reid to Major-General J. W. Carson, – Appendix: Graves Registration,” 17 October 1916.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

The memorandum concluded by recommending several changes to the way graves were handled in Britain. The first was that an officer in charge of graves marking and registration should be appointed under the Adjutant-General, along with a staff to take up the proper marking of graves in Britain. Next, it suggested that a supply of standard plain crosses should be made available for purchase. These crosses could be used to mark the graves in the interim. Finally, it noted that an officer of the current branch (presumably the Adjutant-General's Branch) would be tasked with personally overseeing that all graves were marked. The system of registration currently implemented would continue. However, it noted that prompt marking of graves was essential in increasing the efficiency of the system.¹³⁵

By January 1917, a further army order was issued relating to the death and burial of Canadian soldiers in the Britain. It stipulated that for deaths that occurred in a hospital, the officer in charge of the hospital was required to send notification to the Headquarters of the Canadian Forces in Britain and the officer in charge of Canadian records in London. It also gave additional information on the burials of Canadian soldiers in the Britain. Canadian authorities had requested that burials of Canadian soldiers take place in separate graves, not in common graves. The owner of these graves would be listed as the Canadian government.¹³⁶

The order also touched on funeral expenses. It explained that other than funerals conducted at Canadian Training Centres, expenses for funerals were not to exceed £8. All accounts in connection to the funerals were to be sent to the Chief Paymaster of the

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III A1 Box 28, File 8-1-7 (Graves Registration). "Army Order No. 62 of 1917," 11 January 1917.

Canadian Forces. Finally, the order also addressed funerals at Canadian Training Centres in which it explained that the current arrangements were to continue. The exception was that the expenses were not to exceed £4 without reference to the headquarters of the Canadian Forces in the Britain.¹³⁷

By March 1917, the War Office was making further attempts to improve burial policy within Britain.¹³⁸ It noted in a memorandum dated 8 March 1917 that the use of common graves for Dominion soldiers should cease. Previously, soldiers who died as a result of disease or accident were occasionally buried in common graves. The March memorandum is important because it confirmed that common graves were still in use in 1917, because British military and political authorities were finally making a concerted effort to end the practice away from the front. Furthermore, the memo explained that Imperial Funds were to cover the cost of any graves for Dominion soldiers.¹³⁹

Work to concentrate Canadian and Dominion soldiers came to a head in June 1917. In a letter dated 28 June 1917, Colonel B. R. Ward of the London District noted that burials of all soldiers who died in London would soon be completed in the London Necropolis Company, also known as Brookwood Cemetery. Ward stated that this was “the first time in the history of the British Empire [that] a plot of ground has been selected for a representative assemblage of dead soldiers from all parts of the Empire.”¹⁴⁰ Thus, by the middle of 1917, Canadian graves were finally being centralized in one location, albeit only in the London District. With Canadian graves being centralized, a precedent was being set

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ It should be noted that by this time, the Imperial War Graves Commission was all but finalized.

¹³⁹ LAC, Department of External Affairs Fonds, RG 25 Box 335, File 18-26 Part 42 (Canada House Papers), “Letter from B. B. Cubitt,” 8 March 1917.

¹⁴⁰ LAC, Department of External Affairs Fonds, RG 25 Box 335, File 18-26 Part 42 (Canada House Papers), “Letter from Captain C. L. Turnbull to Colonel B. R. Ward,” 28 June 1917.

to better organize graves and move away from the disorganised practice of placing bodies in any available cemetery or gravesite in Britain, something that had occurred throughout the war. While the precedent was set, the practice could not always be followed due to circumstances on the front.

2.8 Burial Identification: How Graves Were Marked by Comrades

The use of the cross to mark graves changed slightly during the war. In 1914, individuals could buy crosses to send overseas to mark the graves of deceased loved ones.¹⁴¹ However, this led to crosses of varying sizes, and in some cases, shapes. Uniformity was implemented after the British military took control of establishing and maintaining cemeteries in 1915.¹⁴² Further reference to the use of the cross was made in a correspondence sent to the First Canadian Infantry Brigade on 10 July 1916. It noted the practice of placing a cross at a grave. Units could obtain crosses with inscriptions on them upon application to the Officer Commanding Graves Registration Unit No. 1. These crosses were treated with creosote and so could not be painted or inscribed upon by units.¹⁴³

Other examples of grave identification were the use of a deceased soldier's equipment as a grave marker. In a later memo, the Staff Captain of the 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade explained that soldiers should employ alternate methods that did not include the use of military equipment when identify a grave. Although the memo did not specifically state the use of crosses, it did highlight other techniques that soldiers used on the field to

¹⁴¹ While sources only generally refer to the use of crosses, non-Christians could also receive a cross with a different religious icon. For example, Jewish graves received a form of memorial above their graves. Similarly, Indian graves received a memorial as instructed by the Indian Army.

¹⁴² Geurst. *Cemeteries of the Great War By Sir Edwin Lutyens*, 13.

¹⁴³ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4036, Folder 1 File 12 – 3rd Canadian Infantry Battalion, 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade, “Ref 35-66,” 10 July 1916.

bury comrades. Soldiers wrote down the particulars or circumstance of death of a comrade and placed in a bottle. The bottle placed in ground with the neck of the bottle inserted at the head of the grave. Another option was to attach the circumstances of death to a peg to be placed at the head of the grave.¹⁴⁴

The reason for the memo was that soldiers had been burying comrades with their full gear. To identify the grave, soldiers placed the deceased's rifle at the head of the grave, with the barrel of the rifle in the ground and the name of the soldier etched into its butt. Despite this widespread common practice, it was determined that the arms used were too valuable to the war effort to continue what was deemed a wasteful use of equipment.¹⁴⁵

By 1918, input was sought from Brigade commanders regarding the design of crosses to be erected over Canadian graves. Specifically, a memo from A.C. MacDonell asked whether crosses should be of a uniform design for all Canadian soldiers, or if each Regiment or Battalion should have specific cross designs for their soldiers. The memo concluded that there would not be any distinction between crosses for officers and those for NCOs.¹⁴⁶ Although crosses were used throughout the war, by the end of the war the cross was replaced by the headstone. This was due to the temporary nature of wooden crosses and the need to have a uniformed designed for commemorative crosses that were metal or other material. These headstones did not include a special design for each corps, but they did include a badge representing the country the soldier was from, as well as a religious emblem, rank, name, unit, date of death, age, and a personal inscription. Non-

¹⁴⁴ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4036, Folder 1 File 12 – 3rd Canadian Infantry Battalion, 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade, “Memo: 32-72,” 11 November 1916.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4045, Folder 3 File 4 – Burials and Cemeteries – 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade, 1st Canadian Division, “Memo: 412-151,” February 1918.

Christians, for example Jewish soldiers, received a different emblem symbolizing the different religious belief. When the identity of the soldier was not known, the motto “known unto God” was placed in lieu of personal information.¹⁴⁷

In addition to soldiers’ graves, war memorials were built to honour ordinary soldiers and those who were missing in action. Discussion of war memorials started as early as August 1917. In correspondence G.R.O 1601, Canadian Divisions requested the ability to erect memorials to fallen soldiers while on the front. The response, A.641-128, dictated that if memorials were to be built, they could only be of a temporary nature. In addition, these “temporary memorials” could only be located in the vicinity of a military cemetery. The reasoning behind this was related to the negotiations over land purchases for the establishment of cemeteries: the land was French agricultural territory and once the war was over this land would be returned for agricultural use. As a result, permission to build permanent memorials on lands that would eventually be returned to France was not granted. However, the memo did elaborate that the IWGC had already been approached with the question of permanent memorials, and had determined that it was then under consideration.¹⁴⁸

At the end of the war, the IWGC was forced to find a way to commemorate soldiers who had no known grave. Commemorating soldiers with no known grave offered a physical place for relatives to visit and mourn the loss of their fallen relative. It provided a sense of closure to the loss, something beneficial to fellow soldiers who survived the war. Although “Known unto God” was used on headstones in these cases, there was no direct

¹⁴⁷ Fabian Ware, *Immortal Heritage: An Account of the World and Policy of the Imperial War Graves Commission During Twenty Years, 1917-1937* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 28-30.

¹⁴⁸ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4066, Folder 1 File 10 – Burials and Cemeteries - 8th Canadian Infantry Battalion, 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade, “A.641-128,” 8 August 1917.

way to commemorate those who had never been found.¹⁴⁹ Thus, in conjunction with the British Government and the National Battlefields Memorial Committee, the decision to erect battle memorials on the Western Front was made. The Dominions were also included in this process, which had already discussed plans of their own to establish memorials to their missing. Despite jointly working toward establishing memorials, Canada, along with most other Dominions, in some cases chose to commemorate its missing separately and in addition to United Kingdom memorials. The most notable Canadian example of commemoration to missing soldiers is the Vimy Memorial.

2.9 Conclusion

Unlike the process of registering graves, there was a loose framework for how soldiers were to be buried at the start of the First World War. Despite this framework, the actual process of burying soldiers became quite convoluted, exposing the ineffectiveness and unpreparedness of the British army in dealing with death during the First World War. Though military orders and accords such as the 1906 Geneva Accords and the 1914 Field Service Regulations established practices on the battlefield, they quickly broke down due to the sheer number of dead bodies that armies had to deal with.

As a result, armies resorted to quick solutions, such as the use of mass burials, to quickly deal with mounting body counts. Though used in previous conflicts, mass graves grew unpopular among soldiers and civilians alike. This was likely due to the new type of

¹⁴⁹ Little reference is made to finding body parts. Those that are made tend to discuss the desensitization of death by soldiers by incorporating these body parts in their daily routines, such as shaking a dead man's arm. It is suspected that body parts found were buried in an unmarked grave. For example, pilots who crashed during the Second World War and whom could not be identified had their graves placed closer together to signal that the flight crew were buried in one plot.

professional soldier, one whose loved ones were not willing to accept the old way of doing things.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, sentiment regarding death was changing in Britain at this time. The desire for a Christian burial and final resting place, similar to civilian burials, was overtaking military life.

By 1915, burials of the dead on the front encountered a plethora of problems stemming from the unpreparedness of the army. These problems can be separated into three different categories: burials, notification of death and burials, and battlefield conditions. Concerning burials themselves, a soldier's body was not always properly buried. This included an isolated burial, a common or mass grave, in a farmer's field, in a forward area, in a military cemetery, or not at all. Notification of death and burials also suffered from some initial problems. First, units either did not always submit the notification of death and burial form to headquarters, or headquarters were not informed of the notification of death via the form. As a result, the location and identity of the soldier buried could be lost forever. Furthermore, central registries of burials did not exist until 1916. Finally, battlefield conditions also impacted burials. In some cases, soldiers found bodies and took items off them as souvenirs, contrary to the 1906 Geneva Convention. Moreover, because of high-explosive artillery and rapidly moving fronts, graves and cemeteries were sometimes lost or completely destroyed.

While 1917 proved to be a turning point for burials as army regulations were changing less and focused more on republishing previous regulations, which gave a better sense of burial expectations. The establishment of the Corps and Divisional Burial Officers also dramatically improved the way soldiers were buried. Prior to this, the Battle of the

¹⁵⁰ "The Imperial War Graves Commission." *Times* [London, England] 10 Nov. 1928: vi. *The Times Digital Archive*. Web. 18 Jun. 2016.

Somme had demonstrated a strong need for a formal organization to deal with the burial of soldiers. By the time of Vimy Ridge in 1917, burials were effectively and efficiently conducted, albeit with some occasional problems.

It is clear that the practice of placing identification markers slowly changed throughout the war. For the most part, however, it was *not* indicative of poor military planning. The practice of memorializing a comrade's grave generally evolved throughout the war due to underlying circumstances. As the war progressed, the practice of engraving the name of a comrade on their rifle's butt, although an unofficial practice, was phased out due to the need for armaments. As cemeteries were placed in the care and control of the DGR&E, graves were standardized instead of remaining regionalized, and they became the responsibility of individual commanders of Grave Registration Units. Finally, at the end of the war the graves were again transferred to control of the IWGC. This allowed for beautification of cemeteries as well as standardization, leading to the establishment of the headstones at graves of fallen soldiers.

The process of burials during the First World War demonstrated that burial policies were not prepared for twentieth-century warfare. Modern warfare was quite different than nineteenth-century warfare in that a citizen army was predominantly used over recruits, resulting in a need to enhance burial policy. The need to provide a Christian burial and a final resting place, and a sense of duty to provide a permanent place for next-of-kin was the main focus soldiers had when conducting burials during the First World War. While soldiers were quick to adopt a new view on death and dying, the army was slow to respond to this need by providing a coherent burial and registration policy. The following chapter will explore how burial practices themselves were implemented on the front lines and the

challenges front-line soldiers faced regarding moral obligations, feelings of camaraderie, and the extraordinary measures that some soldiers took to ensure a final resting place for a soldier that his family could visit.

Chapter 3: The Psychological Impact of Death and Burial on the Front

Reactions to the deaths and burials of soldiers varied whether it was by another soldier on the front, a civilian at home, or politicians in the House of Commons. The regular soldier felt a sense of duty to ensure that his fallen comrades received a proper burial while at the front; this sense of duty was manifest in acts of heroism such as taking extraordinarily risky actions to ensure a body was brought back from no-man's-land. Civilians were also interested in what happened to soldiers after death. Relatives were concerned with the burial and final resting place of their loved ones, and the public also took a keen interest in ensuring a soldier's body was buried and their gallant stories collected.

It is especially interesting to note the public perception of burials since civilian practices had started to replace military procedures prior to the First World War, as historians Luc Capdevila and Daniele Voldman noted. At the beginning of the war, military and political authorities gave minimal thought to the idea of how soldiers who died serving their country were buried. However, the idea of commemoration was growing throughout British Empire, and it forced the army and government to develop a way to care for the graves of fallen soldiers. For the first time, the British army was a "citizen army."¹ Capdevila and Voldman further explained that there was an influential movement throughout the war to improve the treatment of military casualties and to ensure they were treated according to civilian traditions. This included individualized burials, identification of remains, and recognizing the right to repatriation.²

¹ Julie Summers, *Remembered: The History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (London: Merrell, 2007), 12.

² Luc Capdevila and Daniele Voldman, *War Dead: Western Societies and the Casualties of War*, trans. Richard Veasey (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 55.

This chapter will explore the psychological impact that death and burials had on soldiers, the impact that loss had on civilians, and the need for commemorative practices. For soldiers, ensuring a comrade received a proper burial was often considered a top priority, with some soldiers taking extreme measures to retrieve the body of a fellow soldier. When it was time to pay their last respects and bury a soldier, the burial party typically displayed mixed emotions, including expected sorrow, but also joy, since the burial party was ensuring a final resting place. It was typically the soldiers in the burial party who ensured their comrades received the proper respects deserved for their sacrifice. It should be noted that the emotion of joy typically only occurred when soldiers were burying comrades from their own unit.³

While soldiers felt mixed emotions when burying a body, they also expressed strongly negative emotions and reactions when forced to bury the remains from particularly heavy fighting, such as on the Somme. Soldiers felt it was their duty to provide a proper or Christian burial for fallen comrades as it was as a way to honour their sacrifice. As such, soldiers unconsciously devised coping mechanisms to deal with the daily deaths. These sometimes morbid practices helped ensure that a soldier on the front was able to get through a day dealing with burial and death, and also allowed soldiers to become desensitized towards the prospect of death, dying, and burials, resulting in their ability to continue fighting.

While attention is typically paid to the emotional effects of soldiers burying their comrades on the front, the death of soldiers also had a profound impact for civilians both

³ Library and Archives Canada, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4066, Folder 1 File 12 – 8th Canadian Infantry Battalion 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade – Casualties– 14/1/17 to 12/6/18, “Army Order A. Q. 52-312 from Captain P. E. Colman,” 28 July 1917.

at home and, more importantly, on the war front. Civilians on the war front felt a sense of duty to ensure ‘their boys’ were treated properly after death, occasionally ensuring proper burial and grave maintenance. In other cases, these civilians approached military and burial party staff to inform them of recent deaths or of graves that were not known to military officials.

3.1 After Death – Camaraderie among Soldiers

Although the First World War signalled a marked change in official attitudes pertaining to the care of deceased soldiers’ bodies, the same attitude change was not present among soldiers. This was largely due to the fact that regular troops had always attached a sense of camaraderie to the fallen, even before the First World War. In some cases, this sense of camaraderie was expressed through simple deeds. In other cases, camaraderie manifested itself in dangerous and reckless attempts to recover bodies from the battlefield, even though the body was not always known to the recovery party. As we will see, soldiers took it upon themselves to establish temporary memorials and other forms of remembrance for those who had fallen.

By December 1914, stories were already circulating about honouring the graves of fallen soldiers. R.A.L. Broadley, a member of the British Red Cross Mobile Units, illustrated in a letter his vain attempt at digging a hole in a field to erect a cross for a fallen soldier. While he was working, a group of ‘Tommy’s’ were marching by.⁴ These soldiers requested leave from their march and aided Broadley in digging the posthole for the cross. As soon as the work was finished, “they all sprang as one man to attention and solemnly

⁴ Tommy is a slang term from the First World War and before which referred to either a single British soldier or a group of British soldiers.

saluted the grave of their dead comrade-in-arms.”⁵ He stated that the actions were impressive and touching to witness.

In another example from February 1915, Reverend William Beattie wrote of his first experience burying soldiers after combat.

I have had my first experience in burying the killed, four at once in three graves, three English and one Canadian, two other Canadian were buried in the trenches, it being too dangerous to bring them out. The four I buried were laid among fallen Soldiers in a pretty R.C. cemetery three hundred and fifty yards behind the trenches. It pressed home the grim reality of War, when the four bodies carried shoulder high on stretchers, and covered with a blanket, were brought one behind the other and laid beside the open graves, then lowered and the earth thrown in upon them. About fifty Soldiers who were available attended and did Military honours to their dead brothers.⁶

Burying soldiers was sometimes seen as a fitting end to days of heavy fighting. In his memoirs, Lieutenant Charles Henry Savage, of the 5th Canadian Mounted Rifles, noted being part of a burial at Maple Copse. Following what Savage called “a trip,” “a special party of sergeants and old NCOs were organized to go into Maple Copse and identify and bury as many of our men as possible. This was a fitting end to a gloomy ten days.”⁷

Lieutenant Wilbert H. Gilroy, with the Canadian Dental Corps, summed up the process of burials. In a letter from March 1916, Gilroy explained the difference in burials between officers and rankers. While officers received better treatment than rankers, Gilroy noted that burials did not matter to those being buried, but rather to his friends:

All the officers are first placed in the morgue and then they received a proper burial from that. Some of the poor men are not so lucky. I suppose you could scarcely term it lucky as it really does not make any difference to

⁵ Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, MU 1 - Narrative Letters and Reports, “Report – No Title – signed R A L Broadley,” 6 December 1914.

⁶ Vancouver Island University, The Canadian Letters & Images Project, “Letter from Reverend William Beattie,” 24 February 1915, accessed November 15, 2017 from: <http://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-9025>.

⁷ VIU, The Canadian Letters & Images Project, “Memoir of Charles Henry Savage,” 1936, accessed November 16, 2017 from <http://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-8359>.

the man in question, but it is rather nice for his friends, to know that they have rec'd a proper burial.⁸

Gilroy's letter perfectly encapsulates the sense of relief and closure that proper burials provided for comrades of dead soldiers.

Soldiers also took undue risks during combat to ensure that the graves of their fallen comrades were properly cared for. In a letter to the Adjutant General dated 21 August 1915, Fabian Ware outlined the circumstances around burial sections and individual units incurring risks near firing lines. Work caring for and marking graves had to be completed much closer to the firing lines than Ware and other section commanders had anticipated. As such, orders were issued for soldiers not to take unwarranted risks when caring for graves. Ware, however, explained that officers actually complained about this order and strongly supported the effort to ensure that "the very best moral impression is erected among the men who are constantly engaged in fighting by seeing that the graves of those who had fallen were being properly looked after."⁹ Thus, properly caring for a grave meant a great deal not only to the man caring for the grave, but also to the men fighting on the front, as this gave them a sense of assurance that they would also have an appropriately cared for final resting place. These sentiments were best displayed in a letter from the Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in 1916, Sir Douglas Haig. In his letter of 15 March 1916, Haig gave a unique description

⁸ VIU, The Canadian Letters & Images Project, "Letter from Wilbert H. Gilroy," 16 March 1916, accessed November 15, 2017 from <http://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-1415>.

⁹ CWGC Archives, Folder GRC 1 – Narrative Letters and Reports, "Report of the work of the GRC," 21 August 1915, 6.

of Graves Registration Commission (GRC) workers attempting to record the names and locations of graves:

It has an extraordinary moral value to the Troops in the Field as well as to the relatives and friends of the dead at home. The mere fact that these officers visit day after day the cemeteries close behind the tranches, fully exposed to shell and rifle fire, accurately to record not only the names of the dead but also the exact place of burial, has a symbolical value to the men that it would be difficult to exaggerate. [sic]¹⁰

In fact, Ware later explained that negotiations between the French and British armies relating to the burial of British soldiers in France and the French Law of 1915 were a result of camaraderie between the two armies at the time of negotiations.¹¹

Soldiers typically sought to ensure that their fallen comrades received a proper burial and resting place, in order to honour both the soldier and his family. In some cases, soldiers of a unit felt so strongly about this that they refused to let anyone else bury their soldiers. An example of this was mentioned at a meeting at 4th Army Headquarters on 2 August 1916. In attendance was Lieutenant-Colonel Whitehead, Major A. Courage, Deputy Assistant Adjutant General (DAAG) of the 4th Army, Major A.A. Messer, commanding officer of the graves registration units, and Captain Viscount Stopford, commanding officer of grave registration unit number 3. At the meeting, it was noted that during recent fighting, the Cavalry and other branches were sent onto the field to bury the fallen. However, the men of the units opposed the Cavalry burying the dead as they had a strong desire to bury their own dead.¹² In another example, Private G. Eyre, while on the

¹⁰ CWGC Archives, Folder WG 1298 -Prince of Wales Committee, “Correspondence: D. Haig to The Secretary, War Office,” 15 March 1916.

¹¹ CWGC Archives, Folder WG 1298 -Prince of Wales Committee, “Minutes of a Meeting of the Prince of Wales’ National Committee for the Care of Soldiers’ Graves,” 27 May 1916.

¹² CWGC Archives, Box DGRE 1 – 19 (SDC 4), Folder DGRE 7 – Burial Companies and Corps, Formation of, “Meeting of the 4th Army,” 2 August 1916.

Somme, noted the imperative need to bury his fallen comrade: “We can’t leave him to be trampled and heaved about like an old sack. Come on ... let’s try to cover him up.”¹³ The decision to allow units to bury their own dead was revealed in July 1917 with the circulation of Army Order A. Q. 52-312 by Captain P.E. Colman, DAAG in the 1st Canadian Division.¹⁴

Each soldier felt a sense of duty toward a fallen comrade, which often led to extraordinary measures being taken to recover bodies. In some cases, attempts to recover bodies from No Man’s Land went beyond the call of duty. A letter from a captain in the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade dated 23 February 1917 detailed the efforts of Captain W. D. Herridge, and acting Lance Corporal (A/L/Corpl) R. C. Dyer of Brigade Headquarters to recover a body from No Man’s Land. Herridge was conducting a routine tour of the lines, with Dyer as his guide. The duo came across a body in No Man’s Land during combat. To recover the body, Dyer crawled out into No Man’s Land between the fire and support trenches in an attempt to bring the body back. However, he was only able to bring it back a short distance, which led Captain Herridge to work his way out to Dyer in a sap, a type of advance trench at right angles to a main trench, and they were then able to carry the body to a trench together.¹⁵

The sentimental notion of needing to retrieve a body was not limited to simply retrieving the body. In other cases, Canadians took special care to repair various graves. In

¹³ Quoted from Peter Hodgkinson, “Human Remains on the Great War Battlefields: Coping with Death in the Trenches” (MA Diss, University of Birmingham, 2006 – Unpublished), Pg. 48. Originally from: G.E.M Eyre, *Somme Harvest*, (London Stamp Exchange: 1991), 162.

¹⁴ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4066, Folder 1 File 12 – 8th Canadian Infantry Battalion 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade – Casualties– 14/1/17 to 12/6/18, “Army Order A. Q. 52-312 from Captain P. E. Colman,” 28 July 1917.

¹⁵ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4045, Folder 3 File 4 – 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade 1st Division Burials and Cemeteries- 6-7-16 to 27-2-18, “Letter from [illegible] to Colonel Kearsley,” 23 February 1917.

a letter from the *Chef de la Mission Militaire Francaise attachée a l'Armée Britannique*, special thanks was given to the First Army for its enthusiasm in repairing French graves damaged by the constant fighting.¹⁶ In so doing, this letter helps to display the camaraderie between all allied troops, not just Canadians.

After bodies were recovered, special attempts were made to commemorate soldiers upon burial. Commemorative efforts included inscriptions on crosses, memorial crosses and memorials, special church services, and even special arrangements during burials. Despite the desire to add inscriptions to wooden crosses, a memo to the 1st Canadian Brigade from July 1916 described how this was not possible due to the way in which the crosses were prepared. The memo specified that the crosses were treated with creosote as a finisher. Thus, the crosses could not be painted. Further, registration units did not wish for inscriptions to be carved in them before they were painted.¹⁷

Although temporary wooden crosses were suitable for inscriptions, they were later replaced by permanent memorial crosses placed at a grave. Alternatively, memorials could be placed in areas in which troops sustained a high number of casualties, such as Vimy Ridge. Such memorials were only to be temporary according to provisions under the French 1915 law nationalizing burials. However, memorial crosses were prevalent in England. Attempts to erect the crosses were highlighted by Captain T. W. Lawson's letter to the Canadian Headquarters in Sussex, in which he explained that three men were required to construct an unspecified number of crosses. The crosses would be constructed

¹⁶ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4045, Folder 3 File 4 – 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade, 1st Canadian infantry Division – Burials and Cemeteries – 6-7-16 to 27-2-18, “A.Q. 28-75,” Received 5 July 1917.

¹⁷ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4036, Folder 1 File 12 – 3rd Canadian Infantry Battalion, 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade: Burials & Cemeteries – March, 1915 – February 1917, “Ref 35-66. 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade memo,” 10 July 1916.

throughout England and would take approximately six months to complete.¹⁸ In the end, the three men requested by Lawson were delayed by a month. Despite this, alternative arrangements were made to ensure the memorial crosses were finished without delay.¹⁹

British and Canadian soldiers in France also saw memorials as an important aspect of commemorating fallen soldiers. Although soldiers placed significance on memorials, previous arrangements dictated that no permanent memorials could be built during the war since the land would be returned to French citizens, typically French farmers. However, temporary memorials could be established. One memorial, a temporary cross, was constructed at La Folie Farm to commemorate the Canadians from the 3rd Canadian Division who fell after the battle of Vimy Ridge. The unveiling ceremony happened on 1 July 1917, and each infantry brigade was asked to furnish one officer to represent the brigade headquarters. An officer and four other ranks from each battalion of its brigade were to be furnished to represent each battalion.²⁰

Despite the construction of the La Folie Farm cross, a memo was sent by Major W. Bovey, to the entire Canadian Expeditionary Force in August 1917 explaining that the issue of divisional memorials had arisen. The memo detailed that there were to be absolutely no permanent memorials, but that temporary memorials could be built. The decision was due to wishes of the French government since the former battlefields would be returned to French citizens, who were typically farmers. However, if a temporary memorial was built,

¹⁸ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 390, File B-19-1 (Burial Grounds and Marking of Soldiers' Graves – Brighton), "Minute II BA. 4-1-5 - Captain T. W. Lawson," 11 November 1916.

¹⁹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 390, File B-19-1 (Burial Grounds and Marking of Soldiers' Graves – Brighton), "AG 2-2-108. Captain T. W. Lawson." 12 December 1916.

²⁰ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4197, Folder 1 File 21 – 58th Canadian Infantry Battalion, 9th Infantry Brigade Memorial – At La Folie Farm, "1165/AQ.15-1-54. Staff Captain of the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade," 29 June 1917.

it was understood that at the end of the war, the memorial would be liable for removal subject to the requirements of the land, such as agricultural use. The memo also informed soldiers that the question of memorials had been brought up by the Imperial War Graves Commission for consideration.²¹

Although the memorial cross for those who perished at Vimy Ridge was finally unveiled to troops in July 1917, similar memorials were rejected by military authorities. In a letter to the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries (DGR&E), Major-General W. E. Hodgins described that British army regulations did not allow any memorials to be erected on graves other than standard gravestone or temporary cross. He stated that steps should be taken to ensure that this fact was widely known in Canada to spare relatives of any surprise with the decision.²² The attached draft militia order explained that the decision was made due to the difficulties of transporting such memorials in addition to other military reasons, namely the equality of treatment ideal which had emerged by 1917.²³

3.2 Death, Burial, and Morale

The deaths and burials of soldiers became a morale issue on the front, as Peter Hodgkinson described in his 2006 dissertation. He used the example of Reverend E. C. Cross, who wrote:

Burials on active service had very great practical importance. In the first place if one had buried a man's body one knew for certain that he was dead. Secondly, nothing is more depressing to the living to see unburied dead about them. In some areas e.g. at Beaumont Hamel in the winter of 1916

²¹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Volume 4066, Folder 1 File 10 – 8th Canadian Infantry Battalion 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade – Burials and Cemeteries – 1/7/17 to 10/8/17, “A. 641-128,” 8 August 1917.

²² LAC, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24 Box 1216, File HQ 512-19-1-A – Policy and Procedure – Location of Graves – CEF, “H.Q. 512-19-1 – Correspondence: Major General W. E. Hodgins to the Directorate of Graves Registration & Enquiries,” 11 March 1917.

²³ Ibid.

the ground was covered with unburied dead and it became a matter of real military importance that the work of burial should be conducted.²⁴

Hodgkinson included additional personal quotes from military personnel on the front to support the morale issue that burials posed to soldiers. For example, Lieutenant-Colonel Fraser-Tytler added that “The ‘Body Snatcher’ or ‘Cold Meat Specialist’ (Corps Burial Officer) ... was most useful in removing our pet aversions, which otherwise might have remained unburied for months.”²⁵ The issue of unburied dead was a substantial issue among soldiers, which impacted the morale of soldiers on the front. Soldiers developed cold and emotionless nicknames for the Corps Burial Officers assigned to bury the dead.

Military officials also recognized the issues caused by poor morale and burials. By 1917, Fabian Ware, head of the DGR&E, had delved into the question of morale. In correspondence with Lieutenant-Colonel A. A. Messer of the Graves Registration Units (GRU) in France, Ware expressed concern that “the more work at the future development of [the Directorate] the more clearly I see that there is certain to be a great outcry as to the numberless graves that must anyhow be missing, and it will only be natural for everybody to use us as the scapegoat.”²⁶ Moreover, Ware expressed that “it is obvious from their general attitude that some of our highly placed friends do not want to be bothered with this graves question at all and it might be unwise to press them too hard on the question.”²⁷

²⁴ Quoted from Peter Hodgkinson, “Human Remains on the Great War Battlefields: Coping with Death in the Trenches” (MA Diss, University of Birmingham, 2006 – Unpublished), 45. Originally from: Reverend E.C. Crosse, *The History of the Chaplain's Department in the War of 1914-18* IWM DOCS 80/22/1.

²⁵ Quoted from Peter Hodgkinson, “Human Remains on the Great War Battlefields: Coping with Death in the Trenches” (MA Diss, University of Birmingham, 2006 – Unpublished), 45. Originally from: N. Fraser-Tytler, *With Lancashire Lads and Field Guns in France* (Manchester: John Heywood, 1922) quoted in A. Simpson *Hot Blood and Cold Steel* (Bath: Tom Donovan, 1993), 107-8.

²⁶ CWGC Archives, Box 2033, Folder DGRE 1-19 (SDC 4), File DGRE 7 (Burial Companies and Corps, Formation of), “Correspondence: Fabian Ware to A. A. Messer,” 2 February 1917.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

The morale issue may have been linked to the unsatisfactory handling of burials, however, it was also a direct result of the unpreparedness for war. Ware voiced his belief that nothing else but scattered bodies and improper burials could have been expected from the Somme Offensive. He then attributed this to England's general unpreparedness for the war. Ware concluded that he would be glad to answer criticisms of the military burial shortcomings, but that he could not defend the present omission of facts relating to the lack of burial organization during the Somme Offensive itself. Further, Ware noted that the resulting realities meant that the men of the DGR&E could not be held responsible for the subsequent situation on the Somme.²⁸

The problems of burial and morale that Ware faced continued into June 1917. In correspondence with Captain Cornock Taylor, Ware noted that wounded soldiers returning to England from the Somme had been complaining bitterly about the number of bodies still lying unburied on the battlefield.²⁹ Though the question did not relate to the DGR&E per se, it did relate to the general morale of troops. Ware believed that any negative reactions to bodies strewn across the Somme battlefield would harm the work of the Directorate and of graves registration in general.³⁰ As a result of the failure to bury soldiers after the Somme, the Corps and Divisional Burial Officers were established to avoid these failures in future offensives like Vimy Ridge.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ The number of unburied bodies scattered throughout the Somme battlefield were deemed so bad that a general request was made for one thousand men to be supplied for a period of six to eight weeks to carry out the burials.

CWGC Archives, Box 2033, Folder DGRE 1-19 (SDC 4) File DGRE 7 (Burial Companies and Corps, Formation of), "C. R. 1/102," 2 July 1917.

³⁰ CWGC Archives, Box 2033, Folder DGRE 1 – 19 (SDC 4), File DGRE 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "Correspondence Fabian Ware to Captain Cornock Taylor – DGR&E," 29 June 1917.

Casualties during heavy fighting also had a profound impact on the morale of soldiers. A common practise was to lay bodies close to the roads while awaiting transportation to a cemetery or, if near a cemetery, to bury the bodies in a grave. Although a convenient practise for transporting bodies to a forward area or a cemetery, laying bodies along roadsides also had the potential to deeply affect the morale of soldiers marching on the road toward the active front.³¹ Similarly, using the same men who had carried out an attack on an enemy position to bury the dead also posed risks. Though soldiers in a unit exhibited a strong desire to bury a unit's own dead, there were also instances in which it was responsible for causing poor morale within the unit. For example, 2nd Lieutenant W.N. Collins of the 51st Highland Division was designated to bury the dead after the successful assault at Beaumont Hamel. Stretcher bearers accompanied him as he collected the killed, and "quite a number of [them] were related to the ones who were dead, brothers, cousins, and they of course were very upset, very very upset."³²

The act of burying a body itself was depressing for the men involved although as Peter Hodgkinson asserted, the failure to bury the dead had the same or similar negative morale impact as burying a body.³³ Hodgkinson cited forty-four personal accounts on the front, a majority of which expressed that the process of clearing the battlefield and burying bodies was traumatizing. For example, Lieutenant P. King recorded that "it was a terrible

³¹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4059, Folder 1 File 15 (5th Canadian infantry Battalion, 2nd Canadian infantry Brigade Burials and Cemeteries 21-8-17 to 14-11-18), "Copy to Captain E. R. C Meredith (For Information)," 5 October 1918.

³² Richard van Emden and Stephen Humphries, *Veterans: The Last Survivors of the Great War* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 1998), 130.

³³ Peter Hodgkinson, "Clearing the Dead," *Centre for First World War Studies* Volume 3:1 (2007). Retrieved from <http://www.vlib.us/wwi/resources/clearingthedead.html>.

job ... deeply depressing for the men.”³⁴ Another first-hand account noted that burial was “always a gruesome task, disliked by all, and frequently made the hardest sick, but it just had to be done.”³⁵ However, the one account that fully captured the impact that burials had on the morale and well-being of men was that of Private J. McCauley, who explained that:

Often have I picked up the remains of a fine brave man on a shovel. Just a little heap of bones and maggots to be carried to the common burial place. Numerous bodies were found lying submerged in the water in shell holes and mine craters; bodies that seemed quite whole, but which became like huge masses of white, slimy chalk when we handled them. I shuddered as my hands, covered in soft flesh and slime, moved about in search of the disc, and I have had to pull bodies to pieces in order that they should not be buried unknown. It was very painful to have to bury the unknown.³⁶

In another instance, Sergeant E.L. MacNachtan made note of the effect that burials were having on Major Chaplain William Beattie, the chaplain of the Canadian First Brigade:

I saw Major Beattie (Chaplain of the first Brigade, Infantry) yesterday. He held a burial service at poor Dicky Boone's burial. The Major looks and seem very well but his nerves are pretty well shaken, like the rest of us, the strain is beginning to tell.³⁷

Not surprisingly, burials had a significant effect, both positive and negative, on the morale of the entire force.

³⁴ Quoted from Peter Hodgkinson, “Human Remains on the Great War Battlefields: Coping with Death in the Trenches” (MA Diss, University of Birmingham, 2006 – Unpublished), 47-48. Originally from: Lieutenant P. King quoted in L. McDonald, *They Called It Passchendaele*, (London: Penguin, 1993) p. 210.

³⁵ Quoted from Peter Hodgkinson, “Human Remains on the Great War Battlefields: Coping with Death in the Trenches” (MA Diss, University of Birmingham, 2006 – Unpublished), 48. Originally from: T. Brookbank IWM DOCS 99/13/1.

³⁶ Quoted from Peter Hodgkinson, “Human Remains on the Great War Battlefields: Coping with Death in the Trenches” (MA Diss, University of Birmingham, 2006 – Unpublished), 48. Originally from: J. McCauley, IWM DOCS 97/10/1.

³⁷ VIU, The Canadian Letters & Images Project, “Letter from E.L. MacNachtan to Lieutenant-Colonel N.F. MacNachtan,” 30 April 1915, accessed November 17, 2017, from <http://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-3444>.

To deal with the grim reality of both war and death, soldiers on the front became inured towards the notion of death. Private David McLean described the experience of finding bodies and dead on the battlefield and in the trenches:

I will never forget the last time I went into the trenches there was a skull sticking out of the side of the trench and a couple of nights after I was moving some sand bags in the front trench and there was some poor fellow lying underneath with all his kit on but you have to get used to such things. For I won't be sorry when this war is all over for when you're out here so far away from home and see so many getting killed it makes you think when your turn is coming.³⁸

Growing used to death and hardened to one's eventual time was one way soldiers dealt with the constant warfare. Gunner Bertram Howard Cox, instead, sought to look at the humorous side of life where possible: "She's a terrible war isn't she? But we all look on the humorous side of things if even it's a stiff being buried."³⁹ As explained by historian Tim Cook, soldiers would often touch body parts protruding from trench walls for good luck. In other cases, gas masks and helmets were hung from arms and legs.⁴⁰ Cook also noted one case in which a Canadian soldier described his fellow soldiers shaking a hand protruding from the trench wall. As each soldier marched out of the trench, they would shake the dead man's hand while stating "so long, old top, we'll be back again soon."⁴¹ Cook further noted that soldiers became used to the dead body or pieces of a body and that in some cases, they had become so desensitized, they were not bothered by this sight.

³⁸ VIU, The Canadian Letters & Images Project, "Letter from David McLean," 9 December 1916, accessed November 15, 2017, from <http://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-1875>.

³⁹ VIU, The Canadian Letters & Images Project, "Letter from Bertram Howard Cox," 24 November 1917, accessed November 16, 2017, from <http://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-41697>.

⁴⁰ Tim Cook, "Grave Beliefs: Stories of the Supernatural and the Uncanny among Canada's Great War Trench Soldiers," *The Journal of Military History* 77 #2 (April 2013): 521-542. Pg. 529.

⁴¹ Quoted from: Tim Cook, "Grave Beliefs: Stories of the Supernatural and the Uncanny among Canada's Great War Trench Soldiers," *The Journal of Military History* 77 #2 (April 2013): 521-542, 529. Originally from: Louis Keene, "Crumps:" *The Plain Story of a Canadian Who Went* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917), 109.

3.3 The Need for a ‘Proper’ Burial

Letters from soldiers of the First World War repeatedly refer to giving a soldier a Christian burial or proper burial. As stated earlier, soldiers seemed to conflate the two ideas, however, in some instances, a further description of what was required for a Christian burial and for a proper burial were given. Both soldiers and relatives were obsessed with ensuring that should a loved one or fellow soldier perish during the conflict, the body was treated properly; this could mean either a Christian burial, or simply a proper burial. In a letter from 24 September 1915, Captain W.J.A Lalor mentions the body of Lieutenant Morgan: “The enclosed pocket book was taken from the body of Lieut. Morgan by a burial party from our brigade. The body was given a Christian burial, and all was done that possibly could be done under the awful shell fire that the party was subjected to.”⁴² Whereas Captain Lalor’s letter refers to giving a Christian burial, Lieutenant Wilbert H. Gilroy’s earlier mentioned letter refers instead to a proper burial. Furthermore, Lieutenant Gilroy’s letter also mentioned that it would be nice for a soldier’s friends to know that he had received a proper burial. The sentiment surely extends to a soldier’s family as well.⁴³ Finally, Lieutenant Harry E. Balfour tells of the burial of Lieutenant Eugene Robert Drader in a letter to Drader’s parents. Interestingly, Lieutenant Balfour does not reference either a proper or Christian burial. Instead, Lieutenant Balfour explains that Drader “was buried near where he fell—a real soldier’s burial, not the parade style of military funeral, but the

⁴² VIU, The Canadian Letters & Images Project, “Letter from Captain W.J.A. Lalor,” 24 September 1915, accessed November 16, 2017, from <http://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-2413>

⁴³ VIU, The Canadian Letters & Images Project, “Letter from Wilbert H. Gilroy to Alf,” 16 March 1916, accessed November 16, 2017, from <http://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-1415>.

short hesitating prayer that was said over his grave, with our heads bowed very low on account of the machine gun fire, was the most sincere prayer ever offered up.”⁴⁴

It was not uncommon for soldiers to write to the family or friends of a fallen comrade, or to their own friends to describe the final moments and burial of a soldier. A letter from Private Robert Bell, of the 16th Battalion, notes the death and burial of a Canadian comrade, Frank Skeet: “Frank was killed by a sniper from the mouth of a dug out as near as I can find out he was shot through the chest and died without pain. He was buried beside some of his comrades. There will be crosses over their graves. They generally make a burial ground near every battle ground.”⁴⁵ While it is not clear to whom the letter was addressed, it can be assumed from the rest of the Private Bell’s letter that it was written to a friend. As historian Jonathan Vance notes, Private Bell’s description of Franks death were reminiscent of the typical death letter home. As Vance explains, it was a typical cliché that a loved one perished quickly, leaving out facts such as death from gas or gaping wounds. It was done to hide the horrors of death from relatives and largely became accepted as reality following the war.⁴⁶

In another example, Private Stu Brown wrote to the widow of Private Hadden William Ellis to provide details regarding Private Ellis’ final burial service. Private Brown wrote:

I am taking the liberty of writing you on the hope that these few lines may be of a little comfort to you at this time. Having lost a Brother myself in the war and not having any news (definite) about him for some months I know it was a source of great worry to my parents so considered this rather as a

⁴⁴ VIU, The Canadian Letters & Images Project, “Letter from Lieutenant Harry E. Balfour to Mr. & Mrs. Drader,” 21 September 1916, accessed November 19, 2017, from <http://www.canadianletters.ca/document-61746>.

⁴⁵ VIU, The Canadian Letters & Images Project, Letter from Private Robert Bell to Joe, 6 October 1918, accessed November 16, 2017, from <http://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-16127>.

⁴⁶ Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), 99.

duty than anything else. However I thought probably you might not get the few details that I might give you from any other source. I was not present when your son was killed but have since spoken to one of the boys that was and you may rest assured that there was no pain with his passing out as he was killed instantly. I happen to be one of his pals, as was one of four others and a trumpeter detailed to attend his funeral. You will be able to see it almost as we did if you can picture a beautiful September evening in a large military cemetery and just as the sun was going down behind the western horizon we carried him from the little chapel enshrouded in the Union Jack and laid him to rest, the Chaplain reading the burial service and afterwards the trumpeter blew the "Last Post" as everyone stood at attention and the salute. [sic]⁴⁷

Canadian soldier Jackson Woods also felt a duty to inform the next of kin. Woods explained that

Well Mrs Johns I hardly know how to start this letter. Of course I know you's will have received the sad news of poor Earl's death It's the hardest thing I ever felt my duty to do [...] He did not suffer at all for death came instantly And was buried in a Canadian cemetery. He got a proper burial. The boys of his section burying him the same night has he died. [sic]⁴⁸

Soldiers felt a strong duty to ensure either a proper or Christian burial. Not only did it provide closure for those burying the body, it also provided a sense of relief to the next-of-kin back in Canada.

Soldiers' desire to ensure an appropriate burial continued throughout the First World War. In a letter from 1918, an unnamed soldier wrote to the father of Private Donald Calderwood Reid. The soldier explained that

Captain Hunter our chaplain received at Arras Station that night in order to arrange that those who had gone should receive the honorable and Christian burial to which they were entitled. Next day they were laid away in their last resting place in a registered cemetery but far from Arras. The battalion was erected a substantial cross to mark his honored grave.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ VIU, The Canadian Letters & Images Project, "Letter from Private Stu Brown to Mrs. Ellis," 27 September 1917, accessed November 16, 2017, from <http://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-15010>.

⁴⁸ VIU, The Canadian Letters & Images Project, "Letter from Jackson Woods," 15 September 1917, accessed November 16, 2017, from <http://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-12111>.

⁴⁹ VIU, The Canadian Letters & Images Project, "Letter to Mr. Reid [author unknown]," 1918, accessed November 17, 2017, from <http://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-4040>.

Despite the harsh conditions experienced after three and a half years of fighting, the need to ensure a proper, a Christian, or an honourable burial persisted among soldiers should a fellow soldier be killed.

In addition to ensuring that loved ones received notification of a proper burial, soldiers also felt a need to assure family members of the suitability of the cemetery where their loved one was buried. Major Reverend D.V. Warner wrote to the widow of William Howard Curtis confirming that her son received a proper burial:

You will, I am sure, be glad to learn that your son's body was brought back from the front line for burial. The cemetery in which he was buried is very neat and well kept, provided for the men of the 2nd Battalion. The funeral service was conducted by me on Monday, October 9, at 3:15 p.m. Every mark of respect and honour that could be shown under very rigid active service conditions was observed. I regret that army regulations prevent me from giving particulars about the location of the grave. I have marked the spot with a cross and on enquiry, after the war, it could be easily located, should you or any other members of your family wish to visit the grave.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, Corporal R.H. Hoover expressed surprise in his letter to the Jones family after the loss of their son Lawrence. Corporal Hoover wrote:

Received your very welcome letter to hand some time ago, and sure was pleased to hear from you. I'm sure it was intensely hard for me to write you under the circumstances, but not so great as yours in answering. However, I think it nothing but a chum's duty to write and tell of his death, as it seems to relieve a Mother's troubles somewhat. [...] As for his burial - and referred to in last letter, - Yes he received a decent burial in a soldier's Grave Yard. I visited his grave a month afterwards and much to my delight, it was beautifully fixed up and decorated in various ways.⁵¹

Corporal Hoover's letter, along with previous examples, underlines the sense of duty soldiers felt to write the next-of-kin back in Canada. These letters provided a sense of relief

⁵⁰ VIU, The Canadian Letters & Images Project, "Letter from Reverend Major D.V. Warner," 22 December 1916, accessed November 17, 2017, from <http://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-6794>.

⁵¹ VIU, The Canadian Letters & Images Project, "Letter from Corporal R.H. Hoover," 3 December 1917, accessed November 17, 2017, from <http://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-12038>.

to the grieving families in addition to solace, from the knowledge that their relative had received a proper burial, unlike so many other soldiers whose bodies were lost in the fighting. Moreover, Corporal Hoover's letter expressed surprise and delight at the fact that the cemetery had been beautified and decorated.

In some cases, soldiers felt it necessary to write to an entire town detailing the death of a soldier from the area. In the case of Gunner Henry Ivey, from Cobourg, Ontario, both Chaplain Major William Beattie and Lieutenant Cecil Peterson wrote letters of sympathy to the *Cobourg World*. Major Beattie's letter gave the full details of Gunner Ivey's burial: "The burial had to be after dark and without lights. The grave was dug by kindly Cobourg hands - while every Cobourg boy who could be spared, bowed his head with grief at the burial. It was a bright starlight night, without moon."⁵²

Similarly, civilians wrote back to soldiers expressing sincere thanks and satisfaction at receiving the final details of a loved one's death and confirming a proper burial. In a letter from 22 April 1916, Sara Mackenzie wrote to thank John Law for informing her of the details relating to her son's burial. She wrote:

I never met you but the once, that Sunday at the Forbes. Many times Alister told me about you and how much he thought of you, that now I feel that I know you very well, and want to thank you for your kind thoughtfulness in writing to tell me of the last few moments and the burial of my dear boy, in nearly all of his letters to me he spoke of you. It is such a comfort to know that he did not suffer, and that he was given decent burial. I had such a nice letter from the chaplain and one from your officer, which I value very highly. If you have opportunity will you please thank them for me for their great kindness in writing to me.⁵³

⁵² VIU, The Canadian Letters & Images Project, "Letter from William Beattie to *Cobourg World*," 19 May 1916, accessed November 17, 2017, from <http://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-2923>.

⁵³ VIU, The Canadian Letters & Images Project, "Letter from Sarah Mackenzie to John Law," 22 April 1916, accessed November 18, 2017, from <http://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-61461>.

Civilians also wrote one another regarding the burial of a soldier conducted by their son or husband. For example, after the death of Lawrence Earl Johns, Mrs. Hey Strang wrote to his widow to express her condolences. In the letter, Mrs. Strang referred to the kindness that Johns had provided in writing to them after her own son's death:

I have somehow felt constrained to write to you since I heard of the death of your son in France that land where so many of our own Canadian boys have fallen in the defence of what we believe to be right. Your boy helped to bury mine and he was the first one that wrote to us, a kindness that we appreciated very much as we wondered whether he would have a decent burial or not. I only hope someone is as kind in letting you know about your son.⁵⁴

Soldiers writing to the next-of-kin had a profound impact on the civilians back in Canada. As Mrs. Strang noted in her letter, Johns had buried her own son after he fell in France. Mrs. Strang felt that she owed a letter to Johns' mother, considering his own kindness had provided her with a measure of closure. The letter also shows that next-of-kin were worried about how the bodies of soldiers would be treated during the war.

There was also concern for the bodies of soldiers lost in enemy territory. Uncertainty or not knowing the fate of a fellow soldier added to the trauma of the loss, something described by historian Joanna Bourke. In some cases, opposing soldiers could put hostilities aside to assure a proper burial for such fallen soldiers. Private Maurice Wilfred Bracewell described his experiences working on a burial party after the Battle of Vimy Ridge: "We worked night and day on burial parties and even traded dead with the German burial parties too. Such is War!"⁵⁵ The desire to bury bodies was strong enough to have foes exchange the dead so that proper burials could be carried out.

⁵⁴ VIU, The Canadian Letters & Images Project, "Letter from Mrs. Hey. Strang to Mrs. Johns," 2 October 1917, accessed November 16, 2017, from <http://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-12098>.

⁵⁵ VIU, The Canadian Letters & Images Project, "Memoir of Maurice Wilfred Bracewell," accessed November 16, 2017, from <http://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-9871>.

3.4 No-Man's-Land and the Dead

While soldiers who had died on the front lines and in hospitals were given proper burials, due to the horrific conditions in no-man's land, men who were killed there did not always receive the same dignity in burial. Instead, these bodies became a source for much needed goods and rations. For example, scavenger missions were regularly launched into no-man's-land to acquire supplies from deceased enemy soldiers, and from the ground. During these 'supply runs' it was considered acceptable to remove souvenirs, personal items from the bodies of German corpses, or pieces of the bodies themselves. Yet, it was generally considered unacceptable to take from the bodies of friendly soldiers. In fact, friendly corpses were typically not raided for souvenirs; instead, salvaged rations or equipment would be taken when they were required or they were searched for badges or papers of military value.⁵⁶ Such examples show that while soldiers would undertake gallant actions to bury a soldier, the conditions of war limited the ability to bury a body.

Some soldiers despised scavenging work, while others gleefully engaged in combing no-man's-land for supplies. One soldier described the practice as "fashionable winter amusement." However, other instances of scavenging were committed out of pure necessity, as equipment was in short supply and was needed to continue the war effort. Guy Chapman, of the British Royal Fusiliers, described scavenging situations and opposition to the practice: "The order had gone forth that no man was to return from the front line without some derelict article; a hat, a bomb or two, a barb-wire picket, a Lewis-gun drum. Some units affected to despise this domesticity, boldly returning nil reports." Because the work

⁵⁶ Andy Simpson, *Hot Blood and Cold Steel: Life and Death in the Trenches of the First World War* (Bath: Tom Donovan Publishing Ltd., 1993), 105.

was ghastly – picking through the bodies of both friend and foe was essentially grave robbing – some soldiers maintained the pretense of completing their duty while returning reports describing nothing of value found to their superiors.⁵⁷

While a few soldiers were against the practice of scavenging and souvenir searching, others gleefully participated in it. For example, Private James Douglas McAdam was quite interested in searching for souvenirs, though did not always find them. In a letter after the war, Private McAdam recounted searching a recent battlefield after fighting between the Bolsheviks and Czecho-Slovaks: “Though I searched diligently for souvenirs, I found none- not even a human skull.”⁵⁸ Scavenging body parts during the war was not isolated to combatants either. In other cases, soldiers were interested in pilfering old ruins and cathedrals of human skulls. Canadian soldier Herbert Hill White noted such an occasion: “From here we got a lorry for Bapaume. We visited the ruins of the Cathedral there and I brought home a German skull from a great pile which had been in the Vault of the church for many years.”⁵⁹

Some soldiers were intrigued with what they could find, including the body parts of former comrades or opponents. Meanwhile, other soldiers partook in scavenging assignments to ensure that supplies abandoned or lost in no-man’s-land were not wasted:

Smith saw in this last brain-wave an idea which might be turned to our own profit. This area was strewn with dead. The dead had haversacks. The haversacks had socks. A unit was still judged by the number of men who developed trench feet during the winter. Defeating this disease was a matter of dry socks. The allowance was two pairs per man, both of which were

⁵⁷ Ibid., 106.

⁵⁸ VIU, The Canadian Letters & Images Project, “Letter from James Douglas McAdam,” 21 December 1918, accessed November 17, 2017, from <http://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-6615>.

⁵⁹ VIU, The Canadian Letters & Images Project, “Diary of Herbert Hill White,” 23 September 1917, accessed November 17, 2017, from <http://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-2733>.

usually wet through in the course of a couple of days. Now thanks to salvage, we acquired some thousands of pairs of unauthorized socks.⁶⁰

Thus, despite the loss of comrades, the idea among both soldiers and civilians that soldiers were a resource also existed in the twentieth century. While scavenging for resources was understandable – there was a need to survive – pilfering body parts as souvenirs was a ghastly practice continued from previous wars.

Finally, a few soldiers ventured into no-man’s-land for supplies purely out of curiosity. One soldier, Charles Edmonds, explained his time with Sergeant Coke in no-man’s-land:

There’s a lot of dead Boches along here [...]. This roused my interest, for curiously enough, though I had six months’ service in France and had often seen men hit, it had always been in well-ordered trenches, where casualties were soon disposed of; and I had never seen a corpse [...] When we were up at Messines they lay about this. I pulled the teeth out of one of them and made a necklace of them. All the chaps used to rummage round them for souvenirs.⁶¹

Despite the reference to a necklace made of teeth, few primary documents can be found where soldiers wrote about doing the practice themselves. While Edmonds expressed curiosity at no-man’s-land and death, another soldier, A.O. Pollard, was both intrigued and revolted at what he found on his excursions into no-man’s-land:

On one of these excursions I came across an excellent Burberry with only five small shrapnel holes in it and which I promptly annexed. By it, in the bottom of the shell-hole where I found it, was a solitary head. It stood upright in the centre of the crater and there was no trace of the body [...]. For some reason it fascinated me [sic].

Pollard further debated the origins of the head; if it had been friend or foe, if death had come swiftly, or if a shell had taken the life of “a man without nerves” cowering in a shell

⁶⁰ Simpson, *Hot Blood and Cold Steel*, 107.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 105-106.

hole. He then concluded that should he go in a similar situation, he would want his head to be facing the trenches he never reached.⁶² Similar sentiments were shared through other accounts. In another example, a Colonel venturing into no-man's-land showed an intense interest in the dead:

[He] wanted to know just why the corpse lay in that position, speculate on the caprice which had left a head and a leg with no body to join them. Though I could look on bodies unmoved, I could not abide bare fresh bone: and after a morning in which the Colonel tried vainly to interest me in a complete jaw without skull or cervicle [sic], and with the teeth still fleck with blood, I excused myself from further operations.⁶³

Such examples show that soldiers dealt with the reality of death on the front by becoming desensitized to the prospect of death – that of fellow soldiers' and their own.

3.5 Civilian Reactions to Cemeteries and Burials

Civilians on the war front also took an interest in the burial of fallen soldiers. R.A.L. Broadley noted in his report from December 1914 an incident in which he was involved while investigating the graves of two Seaforth Highlanders on a farmer's property. The distraught farmer approached Broadley about his inability to keep his cows away from the graves. Moreover, he noted that he would have paid any sum of money for the soldiers to have been buried in his back garden instead of in the field.⁶⁴

Broadley also made note of how French peasant women honoured the graves of fallen soldiers. French women routinely left vases of flowers on soldiers' graves in the back gardens of small cottages. In other cases, French citizens planted graves with London Pride

⁶² Ibid., 106.

⁶³ Ibid., 107.

⁶⁴ CWGC Archives, Folder MU 1 - Narrative Letters and Reports, "Report – R. A. L. Broadley," 6 December 1914.

or other types of flowers. Broadley noted the joy he saw from these women when he explained, through an interpreter, that he would return soon to mark the grave with a cross at the head of it. He concluded that he was certain these types of graves would be treated with the greatest reverence and respect possible, as they were seen as sacred property.⁶⁵

In his report to Arthur Stanley, President of the British Red Cross Society, Fabian Ware also made note of the reaction of French civilians to the graves of fallen British soldiers. Ware noted that the French had taken a keen interest in the dead buried in their midst. In some cases, these civilians even bore witness to the death. In one instance, Ware noted that French citizens were ensuring that the graves of fallen soldiers were not only well kept, but had proper markings whenever possible. Ware explained that the inscriptions were perfect and were only missing the names of those buried, which he hoped could be provided.⁶⁶

In another case, Ware received a letter from the wife of the Maire in a village in the Marne District. The wife explained that she would ensure that the four Irish soldiers who were buried in the cemetery would be well cared for and that their graves would not be neglected. The graves would be beautified when resources became available, and the villagers would offer prayers over the graves on every 6th of September and 1st of November. However, Ware explained that it was impossible to collect all stories relating to the gallant actions of these soldiers, their burials, and the civilian attempts to maintain graves. Instead, he believed that gallant stories would be told by French civilians in each of the French districts.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ CWGC Archives, Folder MU 3 - Early Letters about Graves, "Correspondence: Fabian Ware to Arthur Stanley," No date, 5-6.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 6.

Support for the work of the IWGC was also evident among civilians after the war. Anecdotal stories were captured by IWGC officials in 1920. For example, Lady Osler described her experience finding her son's grave. She noted that it was covered with daffodils in full bloom and that she liked the plan the IWGC had laid forth for both Dozinghem cemetery and for the cemetery at Remy Siding.⁶⁸ Similar sentiments were expressed by British civilians such as Mrs. Blois, Mrs. Moncrieff, and C. Pym who wrote to the IWGC expressing their satisfaction with the work being done. Mrs. Moncrieff explained her appreciation for "the perfect thought carried out by the Imperial War Graves Commission" in regards to the loved soldiers. Mrs. Blois thought both Forceville and Louvencourt Cemeteries were perfect, and that they had been planned and arranged in the best way possible. Finally, C. Pym stated his appreciation for the wonderful care taken by the IWGC to honour those who died for their country.⁶⁹

One reason for little pushback for bodies to be returned after the establishment of IWGC cemeteries lies with the success of the IWGC itself. People were kept away from the cemeteries until they were finished. By doing so, IWGC officials were able to showcase pristine cemeteries to families who lost relatives in the war. By showcasing finished cemeteries over allowing civilians into incomplete or non-beautified cemeteries, the IWGC was able to give families the sense they needed to ensure a final resting place.

3.6 Conclusion

⁶⁸ CWGC Archives, Folder ADD 1/1/5. Headstones – Documents, "Interviews with civilians," March and April 1920.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Soldiers took some exceptionally high risks to ensure comrades received a proper burial. Be it simple tasks like falling out of a march to bury the dead, to more risky endeavors, such as venturing into enemy fire to pull a body out of No Man's Land, soldiers' actions expressed a common bond with one another. This bond even extended beyond nationality. Canadian troops buried French bodies exposed to the elements after a harsh battle. French civilians found and reported German bodies, albeit unknowingly. All soldiers were comrades in arms and received respect from one another upon death.

Marking a gravesite and cemetery was equally important to soldiers. Though the general belief was that this did honour the soldier and his family, soldiers found great pride in being able to give that honour themselves; it was a depressing sight to see soldiers' bodies strewn over the battlefield. Such an experience was noted following the Somme Offensive, which resulted in military officials taking action. However, the grueling task took its toll on soldiers, who described grave and burial work in the starkest of terms. Yet this terrible job was also deemed a necessity. The alternative was to bury unidentifiable mounds of bodies, which was thought to be a grave dishonour to soldiers and their families. Because of the nature of this work, soldiers were forced to develop coping mechanisms to ensure they could get through the day. These mechanisms often dehumanised the bodies.

Civilians did their part to ensure bodies were honoured in a proper fashion. Stories of French women laying flowers on graves in France and other such tales were widely known among IWGC staff. Other examples include ensuring graves received proper care and were not to be dishonoured or forgotten, such as graves in the middle of farmer's fields. Civilians tended to accept the work and decisions of the IWGC as painful, yet necessary. Several examples show civilians writing in to the IWGC to show

their satisfaction at how gravesites and cemeteries were being laid out and maintained.

However, some people did not accept this work, and turned to politicians to express their frustration. The following chapter will explore formation of the IWGC and some of the forerunner policies that helped to establish a burial policy and multiple graves registration organizations.

Chapter 4: The Organizational Make-Up of Burials During the First World War

British military officials showed a great deal of concern about soldiers' graves and burials following the South African War. At a War Office meeting in 1916, Lieutenant General Sir Neville Macready explained that during the South African War, there had been no official arrangements made for either burial or grave registration. The British Army retained no responsibility for burials, cemeteries, or the maintenance thereof. Instead, burials, graves, and the like were left to private organizations, namely the Guild of Loyal Women. To this end, these private interests were successful in ensuring the proper burial and registration of soldiers' graves. But, as Macready explained at the War Office meeting, significant logistical problems arose, proving the arrangements to be unsatisfactory. He further argued that had a proper army organization been established to record the burials of soldiers, the intervention of private interest groups would have been unnecessary after the war.¹

Macready likened the South African War situation to that of the Great War in that a private civilian group, in this case the British Red Cross Society, took up the call to oversee burials and registration of soldiers' graves. The British Expeditionary Forces (BEF) held no control over the practices of the British Red Cross, whose officers served without pay. As a result, Macready and Lieutenant General Henry Fowke, Chief Engineer of the BEF, discussed the creation of an army organization to manage the burials,

¹ Library and Archives Canada, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24, Box 1216, File H.q. 512-19-1-A (Policy and Procedure – Location of Graves - CEF), "Notes of a Meeting held at the War Office," 25 September 1916.

registration, and care of soldiers' graves. The resulting army organization was the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries (DGR&E).²

The First World War saw a radical change in how the bodies of deceased soldiers were cared for. Previously, the care and maintenance of graves was an afterthought, to which the British military did not assign any importance at the outbreak of the war. In fact, at the beginning of the war, military hierarchy believed that communal graves, common in past conflicts, would be used.³ Yet the need for a Christian burial and final resting place for individual soldiers changed the attitudes of British and Imperial soldiers on the front and at home. This change in attitude also resonated with Canadian civilians and soldiers, much as it did across the British Empire. What changed? What mitigating factors resulted in a dedicated effort to ensure a final resting place for soldiers of the First World War? To answer these questions, a proper analysis is needed of the organizations that dealt with burials and their evolution. Though the focus is on burial and registration of Canadian soldiers, this chapter will cover British organizations. The majority of the organizations that dealt with burials were in fact British, and, since Canada was a Dominion, still fell under British Imperial rule.

This chapter will introduce the different organizations that dealt with the burial of soldiers and registration of graves. Further, this chapter will trace the evolution of burials under the British Red Cross Society from its origin as a civilian initiative, to a quasi-civilian-military partnership, to a military organization, and back to a civilian-run initiative. Military and civilian officials were slow to adjust to evolved civilian perceptions on death,

² LAC, Department of National Defence Fonds, RG 24 Box 1861 – The Cummins Monograph, Folder 63 (Volume 3: War Graves Registration), “War Office Meeting – 25th September, 1916,” 25 September 1916.

³ Jenny Edkins, *Missing: Persons and Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 132.

which resulted in burial organizations being equally slow to be created and to adapt to the requirements for burial and marking. The central aim of these organizations was to ensure a final resting place for soldiers, something desired by civilians, soldiers, and military officials.

4.1 The Original Responsibility for Graves: The British Red Cross Society

At the beginning of the First World War, the responsibilities of burials, registration of graves, and memorialisation were not well established in the British military. Although the task of ensuring the burial of fallen soldiers was, in some cases, left to individual units, the bulk was left to private organizations such as the British Red Cross Society (BRCS). The Society was comprised of numerous mobile units, which were granted permission to search for British wounded and missing soldiers. These included C. H. Langston Cazalet's Mobile Unit, which was originally granted permission by War Minister Lord Kitchener to seek out wounded and missing soldiers following the Battle of Mons, and Lieutenant-Colonel Fabian Ware's unit, which completed similar tasks.⁴ Ware's unit had the additional task of registering the graves of British soldiers who fell between Ghent and Amiens.⁵

As part of the initial work of the British Red Cross, the organization established a working relationship with French military authorities. The relationship was largely precipitated by the need to retrieve the wounded from the frontlines during the heavy German attack at Albert in the Amiens sector. However, the French medical staff were so

⁴ Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Box 2028, Folder ADD 4/1/3 (Red Cross Record Office), File 388a (Mr Fabian Ware's Mobile Unit - 18 Nov 1914 to 5 Nov 1915), Report – Mobile Unit – 8 March 1915, 8 March 1915.

⁵ CWGC Archives, Box 2033, Folder DGRE 1-19 (SDC 4), File DGRE 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "History of Fabian Ware's involvement with burials," no date.

overwhelmed with wounded that the Red Cross doctors were required to treat wounded French soldiers at the field hospitals. As a direct result, some of the Red Cross Mobile Units were informally attached to the French 10th Army.⁶ It is here that the British Red Cross records reveal contradictions as to when the registration of graves began. In a historical outline written when the DGR&E was first organized, the unnamed author explains that Ware was assigned by the British Red Cross to proceed to France to aid in the search for missing and wounded British soldiers *and* to register the graves of soldiers who had fallen during the fighting in the Ghent and Amiens regions.⁷ However, in C. H. Langston Cazalet's letter and report to Colonel Stewart on the Mobile Units, written in March 1915, Cazalet specified that the work relating to British graves came from the original task of looking for wounded and missing soldiers.⁸

Cazalet stipulated that when the Red Cross Units were searching for lost soldiers, they routinely came across graves of soldiers. Some graves were completely unidentified; others were marked in an ineffective and hurried manner. He asserted that the feeling among the Red Cross workers was that if nothing was done to preserve these graves, and the records of them, the graves would be erased from history. His unit started working to preserve the graves, originally by acquiring sturdy wooden crosses and stenciling the names onto them. Cazalet explained that this work grew to an extent that was not originally anticipated, resulting in resources being assigned from the President of the St. John

⁶ CWGC Archives, Box 2028, Folder ADD 4/1/3 (Red Cross Record Office), File 388a (Mr Fabian Ware's Mobile Unit - 18 Nov 1914 to 5 Nov 1915), "Report – Mobile Unit – 8 March 1915," 8 March 1915.

⁷ CWGC Archives, Box 2033, Folder DGRE 1-19 (SDC 4), File DGRE 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "History of Fabian Ware's involvement with burials," no date.

⁸ CWGC Archives, Box 2028, Folder ADD 4/1/3 (Red Cross Record Office), File 388a (Mr Fabian Ware's Mobile Unit - 18 Nov 1914 to 5 Nov 1915), "Report – Mobile Unit – 8 March 1915," 8 March 1915.

Ambulance to help complete this work. Ultimately, the graves registration work was recognized by the Adjutant-General (A.G.) of the British Army, who took an interest.⁹

Despite Cazalet's letter and report, records of the Mobile Units depict slightly different details surrounding the start of grave registration. The unit's reports include notes on the activities and history of Fabian Ware's Red Cross unit. These notes are almost identical to both Cazalet's report and letter to Colonel Stewart. However, there are small differences. Reference is made to the unit being Colonel Ware's unit and that Ware was the Transport Adjutant. Further, credit is given to Ware as the driving force behind adding the task of grave registration, whereas Cazalet's report implied that Cazalet was a driving force behind adding grave registration to the duties of the Mobile Units.¹⁰ The more likely scenario is that the desire to preserve graves was expressed by more than just Fabian Ware. Evidence from various Red Cross correspondences supports this theory. In correspondence between Fabian Ware and Lord Robert Cecil in December 1914, Cecil explains that General Macready had expressed an interest in the work of the Red Cross units and how they could be useful in tracing the graves of those who had fallen in the campaign. Cecil explained that he desired Ware to head up a unit to conduct searches for wounded soldiers and graves. Cecil also made direct reference to Cazalet, as well as another Red Cross official by the name Carlile.¹¹ Cecil's letter outlines how the British military was becoming interested in burials by the end of 1914.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, File MU 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "Fabian Ware's Unit – Registration of Graves," no date.

¹¹ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, Folder MU 3 (Early Letters about Graves), "Lord Robert Cecil to Fabian Ware," 2 December 1914.

Further correspondence shows that other British Red Cross officers had also taken an interest in preserving graves. In a letter to the Adjutant-General Macready, Ian Malcolm, also of the Red Cross, explained that an agreement detailing Red Cross unit locations was made with Lord Robert Cecil in January 1915. The agreement stated that Fabian Ware would work north of the established line between Beauvais to Laon and Namur, while Malcolm would continue work tracing graves south of that line.¹² In further letters between Ian Malcolm and Fabian Ware, Malcolm conceded that he had heard of the creation of a new graves registration organization¹³, which Ware was to lead. Malcolm requested that Ware allow him to continue his work in the south of France in accordance with the Cecil agreement.¹⁴ Though no reply is recorded for this letter, Ware did write the Honourable Arthur Stanley, President of the British Red Cross Society, on 2 March 1915 stating that he was given control of the sole organization to deal with burials on the Western Front.¹⁵ Further, in notes pertaining to the formation of the Graves Registration Commission, Ware explained that he had reported to the Adjutant-General, who had instructed him to take up and complete the work of undertaken by Ian Malcolm, highlighting the importance that Malcolm had in the early work of grave registration.¹⁶

Ware and Malcolm were not the only people who took an interest in maintaining graves. R.A.L. Broadley claimed to have been entrusted, along with his unit, with the task

¹² CWGC Archives, Box 2028, File ADD 4/1/3 (Red Cross Record Office), File 388a (Mr Fabian Ware's Mobile Unit - 18 Nov 1914 to 5 Nov 1915), "Private and Personal Correspondence – Ian Malcolm to General Macready," 2 March 1915.

¹³ Though this is likely reference to the eventual Graves Registration Commission, a letter from Fabian Ware makes note of his mobile unit being the organization in March 1915.

¹⁴ CWGC Archives, Box 2028, Folder ADD 4/1/3 (Red Cross Record Office), File 388a (Mr Fabian Ware's Mobile Unit - 18 Nov 1914 to 5 Nov 1915), "Ian Malcolm to Fabian Ware," 11 March 1915.

¹⁵ CWGC Archives, Box 2028, Folder ADD 4/1/3 (Red Cross Record Office), File 388a (Mr Fabian Ware's Mobile Unit - 18 Nov 1914 to 5 Nov 1915), "Fabian Ware to Arthur Stanley," 2 March 1915.

¹⁶ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, File MU 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "Report – Graves Registration Commission," 29 March 1915.

of searching for the graves of British soldiers who had been killed in action, and placing crosses at the graves. In addition, Broadley also gives an emotional account of how the work affected him spiritually:

It frequently requires considerable patience and some skill as an amateur detective to find the grave of some poor fellow who has been shot in some out of the way turnip field and hurriedly buried, but I feel my modest efforts amply rewarded when I return a day or two later with a wooden cross with a neat inscription and plant it at the head of his grave, for I have the proud satisfaction of knowing that I have done some slight honour to one brave man who had died for his country.¹⁷

Broadley's accounts help to illustrate how the need to ensure a burial was starting to come to fruition among soldiers on the front.

Although Fabian Ware has been described in recent secondary literature as the man who began registering graves of his own accord, by the end of 1914 this spiritual need to ensure a final resting place for the fallen had already started to influence soldiers and civilians alike.¹⁸ This is, indeed, more plausible. After the war, *The Times* published an article looking at the home-front perception of war graves. The author posited that

These new British soldiers were men whose parents and wives had not accepted, as one of the conditions of a professional soldier's career, the possibility of an unknown grave in a foreign country; their relatives poignantly and insistently demanded the fullest information as to the location of the graves of those who fell.¹⁹

The article articulates how the issues of burials and recognizable graves were entering the public mind at the beginning of the First World War. The argument can be made that throughout the First World War, this sentiment was also affecting those fighting the war.

¹⁷ CWGC Archives, Box 209, File MU 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "Report signed R A L Broadley," 6 December 1914.

¹⁸ For secondary sources that credit Fabian Ware as the sole source in recording the graves of war dead, see: Neil Hanson, *The Unknown Soldier* (London: Random House, 2007), eBook Edition, Jenny Edkins, *Missing: Persons and Politics* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2011).

¹⁹ "The Imperial War Graves Commission," *Times* [London, England] 10 Nov. 1928: vi. *The Times Digital Archive*, Web, 18 Jun. 2016.

Most secondary sources make no mention of Red Cross officers other than Ware or their attempts to register graves during the war. Yet, these attempts existed and ran parallel to Ware's own efforts. Granted, Ware may have been the driving force behind the later Graves Registration Commission (GRC) by March 1915; prior to this, the task of caring and registering for graves was completed by multiple mobile unit commanders at the time, including Ian Malcolm, Ware, and C. H. Langston Cazalet.

From the beginning of the First World War until March 1915, the primary duties of the Red Cross Society had been medical in nature. For a large part of the war, its members were assigned to the French army to assist medical staff in retrieving and treating wounded soldiers. It was through the work with the French army and searches for missing soldiers that the idea of registering graves came about. Despite the uncertainty over who was the driving force behind adding the grave registration to the British Red Cross mobile units, by the beginning of 1915, the Red Cross formalized a unit to deal with burials. Fabian Ware was given command of this unit, in which he took a lead role in determining the policies and practices of grave registration.

4.2 From Civilian Hands to Military Hands: Recognition of the Grave Registration Commission

At the beginning of March 1915, the work of the Mobile Units came under the lens of Adjutant-General Macready who had taken a key interest in seeing its success in grave location and maintenance. As a result, the Red Cross Mobile Unit, under the command of Fabian Ware, was granted official recognition to locate, mark, and register graves of British officers and men by General Macready. Further, the Mobile Unit was re-designated as the Graves Registration Commission (GRC) and placed under the Adjutant-General's Branch

of the British Army – headed by Macready.²⁰ But why was there a need to recognize officially the work of the British Red Cross Mobile Units, and to place them under military authority?

There may have been several reasons for the mobile Red Cross Units to be reorganized. Thomas Laqueur notes that the Red Cross Units had been hastily organized prior to March 1915, which resulted in the need to reorganize them into the Graves Registration Commission by then. Furthermore, Laqueur explained that Field Marshal Sir John French believed that by this time, the care and registration of graves was acquiring a national character. As such, it was felt that the state held a responsibility to maintain graves.²¹

There were organizational reasons for the shift from the Mobile Units to an army hierarchy. Previously, the mobile units had been restricted to behind the front lines. This meant that much of their work was being completed at field hospitals, regimental field cemeteries, and behind the action. However, being unable to work on the front significantly limited the effectiveness of the Mobile Units.²² Once the mobile units were officially recognized as the GRC, they were granted more freedom, including the ability to work on the frontlines in the trenches with both British and French military.²³ Moreover, despite the

²⁰ CWGC Archives, Box 2028, Folder ADD 4/1/3 (Red Cross Record Office), File 388a (Mr Fabian Ware's Mobile Unit - 18 Nov 1914 to 5 Nov 1915), "Fabian Ware to Arthur Stanley," 2 March 1915.

²¹ Thomas Laqueur, "Memory and Naming in the Great War," in *Commemoration: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 153.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ CWGC Archives, Box 2028, Folder ADD 4/1/3 (Red Cross Record Office), File 388a (Mr Fabian Ware's Mobile Unit - 18 Nov 1914 to 5 Nov 1915), "Inspection Report by Lt. Col Edward Stewart – No. 1 Mobile Unit – Fabian Ware," no date.

military recognition and inclusion as part of the Adjutant-General's Branch, the Mobile Units also continued to carry out their Red Cross Society duties.²⁴

Further to the logistical issues of having an independent Red Cross conduct grave maintenance and registration, there were also political and policy issues revolving around burials. Prior to the First World War, French laws had allowed for the bodies of French soldiers to be returned to their families. However, the decree was suspended during the war.²⁵ One of the reasons for this was certainly the sheer number of war dead on the front. By the time the Graves Registration Commission was set up, French bodies had become so numerous, and the manpower needed to deal with them so insufficient, that they were being buried atop one another or burned with lime. Other options were that British soldiers could be buried in paupers' graves. These graves were to be dug over every four years, thus eliminating the potential for a lasting resting place. British military officials wanted to avoid these scenarios because of potential morale ramifications at home and among soldiers; this likely contributed to the creation of the GRC.²⁶

At the same time the Graves Registration Commission was established, a French bill, relating to certain burials, was to be discussed in the French Chamber. In a letter to the Adjutant-General, Fabian Ware explained that there had been propositions whereby certain bodies that had already been buried should be exhumed and cremated. By 31 March 1915, the bill still had not been debated and Ware thought it unlikely that it would be discussed

²⁴ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, Folder GRC 2 (Appointment of Graves Registration Commission), "Report – Graves Registration Commission by Fabian Ware," 3 March 1915.

²⁵ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, File MU 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "Graves Registration Commission – Notes of O.C.'s. visit to Paris," 20 March 1915 to 24 March 1915.

²⁶ CWGC Archives, Box 2028, Folder ADD 4/1/3 (Red Cross Record Office), File 388a (Mr Fabian Ware's Mobile Unit - 18 Nov 1914 to 5 Nov 1915), "Correspondence: Ian Malcolm to General Macready," 2 March 1915.

anytime soon.²⁷ In fact, French military officials opted to ban exhumations of soldiers' bodies during the war, claiming hygiene reasons.²⁸ The only exhumations allowed, according to General Joseph Joffre of the French Army, were for sanitary reasons.²⁹ In fact, during the war, British and French officials were strongly opposed to allowing any exhumation for the sole purpose of identification. Substantial effort was taken to ensure that the only exhumations were for sanitary reasons, or to move bodies to a final resting place. Highlighting this was a letter written by General Macready to Ian Malcolm regarding the work he was completing. Macready received reports that certain bodies had been exhumed by Malcolm. In his letter, the General stated that if the exhumation was done to remove the body from a place that would be inconvenient to the public or proprietor of the land, then it was acceptable. However, he explained that exhumations had been strictly forbidden by the Commander-in-Chief of the army and that the practice of exhumation for identification or removal to Britain was never allowed in the British area.³⁰

Other changes that facilitated the need for a reconstituted burial organization were the new policies and practices regarding burials themselves that were being introduced and discussed in France. Beyond the changes to exhumations and different types of burials, on 2 March 1915, the same day the GRC was officially recognized, the Director of Assistance and Public Hygiene in France was preparing to introduce new measures to mark the graves of all soldiers who had fallen in France. The new policy applied outside of active

²⁷ CWGC Archives, GRC 1 – Narrative Letters and Reports, “Letter: Fabian Ware to A.G.,” 31 March 1915.

²⁸ CWGC Archives, MU 1 - Narrative Letters and Reports, “Graves Registration Commission – Notes of O.C.’s. visit to Paris,” 20 March 1915 to 24 March 1915.

²⁹ CWGC Archives, MU 1 - Narrative Letters and Reports, “Report – Graves Registration Commission,” 29 March 1915.

CWGC Archives, Box 2028, Folder ADD 4/1/3 (Red Cross Record Office), File 388a (Mr Fabian Ware’s Mobile Unit - 18 Nov 1914 to 5 Nov 1915), “Correspondence: General Macready to Ian Malcolm,” 27 February 1915.

operational zones, according to French officials, but also had a view to clearing the ground of 'dangerous substances'.³¹ Reference to dangerous substances was likely made since lime had recently been used to burn the bodies of French soldiers that were too numerous to be put into graves.

In a draft correspondence to the Honourable Arthur Stanley, an unnamed author, presumably Fabian Ware, noted that the British Red Cross Society was not capable of carrying out its mandated duties of moving and treating wounded soldiers as well as the newer duties of registering graves; both tasks could not be satisfactorily undertaken by the same unit. He explained that it was a direct result of this that the army, under the Adjutant-General's Branch, took over the duties of marking and registering graves. With the formation of the GRC, some workers in the British Red Cross decided to resign their contracts so that they could enlist within the British Army for the duration of the war.³² Despite this, the GRC still had civilian connections to the BRCS through its use of personnel and cars.³³

In the same correspondence, the unnamed author also explained that the 1915 French Law nationalized burial grounds and cemeteries, and those buried in them, was an important factor in requiring a military organization to take up the mantle of military burials. Specifically, the rapid development work with regard to grave registration and maintenance, and debate over the eventual French burial nationalisation legislature, demanded that a definitive authority be established. As such, the military authorities were

³¹ CWGC Archives, Box 2028, Folder ADD 4/1/3 (Red Cross Record Office), File 388a (Mr Fabian Ware's Mobile Unit - 18 Nov 1914 to 5 Nov 1915), "Correspondence: Ian Malcolm to General Macready," 2 March 1915.

³² CWGC Archives, Box 2028, Folder ADD 4/1/3 (Red Cross Record Office), File 388a (Mr Fabian Ware's Mobile Unit - 18 Nov 1914 to 5 Nov 1915), "Correspondence: Fabian Ware to Campbell," 4 May 1915.

³³ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, GRC 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "Draft Correspondence to Arthur Stanley," 1915, 3.

compelled to make changes to the way burials had been approached, leading to the establishment of the GRC. Further, with the formation of the Commission, representatives were able to negotiate with the French Government on the French burial nationalisation legislature, which came into force in December 1915.³⁴

Though primarily a British organization, the GRC also had representatives from the various Dominions. Correspondence from Lieutenant-Colonel H. K. B., Officer in charge of Records, details the desire for proper Canadian representation on the Commission. British officials wanted a Canadian representative to deal with ensuring that the next of kin of deceased soldiers buried in France received proper notification of their death. It was felt that an undue burden of work would be assigned to the British Records Office if it had to deal with sending all notifications of death. The future Canadian representative, and the British Records personnel of the GRC, wanted information pertaining to deceased soldiers to be automatically supplied by officers in charge of units in the field in order to streamline the information coming into the Records Office. Both the automatic flow of information and the Canadian representative would help to alleviate any future extra work by properly relaying notifications of death.³⁵

Thus, by 1915, there was a growing need to formally recognize the work that the British Red Cross was conducting. Because of policy shifts, continuing burial problems, and the moral obligation, British military officials were obliged to recognize the work of the Mobile Units. As a result, the Graves Registration Commission came about in March 1915.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III Box 1147, File R-191-4 – Procedure re Graves Registration, “Correspondence – ‘Copy for Graves Registration Procedure File’ – Officer i/c Records to DAG (Canadian Section),” 19 November 1915.

4.3 The Graves Registration Commission: Policies, Practices, and Procedures

Although officially recognized by the Adjutant-General's Branch of the British army, the early rendition of the Graves Registration Commission remained as Fabian Ware's Mobile Unit, which was still under the British Red Cross. Despite this, Ware was working to create policies and procedures within the GRC to be applied to burials, retrieval of bodies, grave marking and registration, and cost allocation. Accordingly, Fabian Ware started by working with the army, attempting to convince it to bear the majority of the costs associated with maintaining the unit, including the costs for maintenance of cars and rations for soldiers in the unit. By 5 April 1915, Ware had received verbal confirmation that the army would absorb all associated costs for the unit and its work.³⁶

At the time of the GRC's creation, officials needed to formulate practices and procedures related to grave identification and maintenance and also needed to consolidate the work completed by Red Cross and army units that had taken the time to record graves. The first task was consolidation of previous work. To do this, the GRC sent representatives to visit cemeteries that already contained buried soldiers but that had not been properly recorded. These representatives were accompanied by the original Chaplains who conducted the burials of soldiers in each cemetery. This allowed the representatives to gain further information about each burial.³⁷

³⁶ CWGC Archives, Box 2028, Folder ADD 4/1/3 (Red Cross Record Office), File 388a (Mr Fabian Ware's Mobile Unit - 18 Nov 1914 to 5 Nov 1915), "Correspondence: Fabian Ware to Mr. Campbell – British Red Cross Society," 5 April 1915.

³⁷ CWGC Archives, Box 2029 GRC 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "Report of the work of the GRC," 21 August 1915, 5.

Commission officials also compiled secondary evidence from a variety of sources. This included information held by the caretakers and grave diggers of each cemetery, reports submitted by army units, and reports submitted by officers of the regional casualty clearing stations. All of the information was later compiled with information held by the 3rd Echelon British Army in order to identify graves that had either not been marked, or had never been recorded.³⁸ Though it seems questionable to commence work before any policies were in place, reports to the Adjutant-General's Branch from the Grave Registration Commission from August 1915 suggest that if this work had started even a few weeks later in some of the cemeteries, a large number of graves would have been permanently lost.³⁹

Commission work was divided between headquarters and sections in the field. Headquarters kept two registers of the graves of British soldiers, along with lists of certain French graves within the British areas. The first register was a list of graves under the names of the officers and men divided into regiments; it detailed whether the grave was accessible and, if so, what inscription the grave had if it was marked. If the grave was not accessible, notes were left detailing who registered the grave. Inquiries made about graves not yet registered were also kept in this register so that any information that was eventually received about the grave could be added to the register and forwarded to relatives of the deceased soldier.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid. Although the report does not give details as to why these graves would have been permanently lost, it does state that a great number of unmarked graves had been overgrown with weeds and did not have proper markings.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1.

The second register detailed the locations of graves arranged geographically. According to a report to the Adjutant-General in August 1915, this register was valuable in that it was possible to show how many burial grounds were in existence, the number of graves at each burial site, and to which units those burials belonged. Yet, the geographic register also enabled GRC staff to replace crosses lost or destroyed due to enemy shell fire and detailed burial grounds that may be lost or evacuated during battle.⁴¹

Whereas the Commission headquarters maintained the two registers of graves, each section worked across the battlefields to supply the necessary information relating to each burial site. At the creation of the GRC, there were four sections of GRC staff – two working in the British zone and two in the French zone.⁴² However, by August 1915, there were eight sections of GRC staff.⁴³ Two sections, A and G, were stationed at B ethune. Section B was stationed at Bailleul and Section C at Poperinghe in Flanders. Section D worked out of the Aisne and Marne region. The final sections were either attached to the army, in the front lines, or in the rear of the army attached to units caring for the lines of communication.⁴⁴

The commanders of each section were assigned multiple tasks. Their primary focus was to mark and report graves to GRC headquarters. Further, they also assisted chaplains, units, and hospitals in ensuring burial returns reached the Graves Registration Commission daily. Once a return was received by the Commission, a cross was prepared by GRC headquarters and dispatched to be erected by the GRC section staff, or by the unit chaplain

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴² CWGC Archives, Box 2029, File MU 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "Report – Graves Registration Commission – To Arthur Stanley from Fabian Ware," 13 April 1915, 3.

⁴³ The GRC report states there were only seven sections of GRC staff, however, it goes on to describe eight sections. This was likely due to two sections being stationed at Bethune.

⁴⁴ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, Folder GRC 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "Report of the work of the GRC," 21 August 1915, 3.

or unit men.⁴⁵ In cases where burial areas were not accessible to GRC officers, usually due to being an active zone, the officers maintained a special section geographic register, which focused on the inaccessible graves. The register was based on a 1/60,000 map. Once the area was accessible to GRC officers, they consulted the map for marking and registering purposes.⁴⁶ These maps later proved vital in locating graves. For instance, they were used to denote the location of graves in hard-fought areas where graves could either be lost or destroyed from enemy advances or shell-fire. This was the case in the Ypres area where crosses were routinely destroyed – something Fabian Ware pointed out in an October 1915 correspondence.⁴⁷

Although the registers dealt with soldiers who had received a proper burial, a large number of soldiers were killed while on an advance or while in No Man's Land. As such, Graves Registration Commission staff began discussing procedures for returning bodies and completing grave work. Fabian Ware describes the resulting practices best in a letter to the Honourable Arthur Stanley. Ware explained that since the majority of the work accomplished by the different sections was typically within range of enemy guns, it required a great deal of experience to know what parts of the active front were accessible for grave work. This experience was gained from working at the front, but also by observing enemy action. For example, Ware explained that one habit of the enemy was to devote attention to specific parts of the line at regular intervals. With this knowledge, GRC

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁷ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, Folder GRC 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "Correspondence – Fabian Ware to the Adjutant-General," 27 October 1915.

staff were able to work in areas of the front that were normally inaccessible due to the fighting.⁴⁸

Although such practices worked to the advantage of GRC staff, Ware also insinuated that the enemy was beginning to change its practices, which would have stopped GRC staff from continuing grave work during lulls in fire. Moreover, even while the lull-in-fire tactic was employed, GRC officials still had problems with staff taking unnecessary risks to mark graves or complete the register of graves. The unnecessary risks became such a problem that Fabian Ware had to send a reminder to all GRC section staff about when to approach graves. Specifically, Ware stated in a letter from May 1915 that “there is no justification for running risks of this kind in the work of the GRC, and this is even more especially the case at a time when the GRC is understaffed.”⁴⁹ Ware followed this up by explaining that graves behind the lines still needed work to complete the register and that these graves should not be neglected in favour of graves at the front, which provide more chances for adventure.⁵⁰

Despite Ware’s harsh assertions about taking risks, he later relented to strictly enforcing instructions given about taking risks. In further correspondence from August 1915, Ware explained that he had been approached by officers of a number of GRC Sections who stated that a very strong moral impression was created among the fighting men by seeing that the graves of their comrades properly looked after. Ware was so moved

⁴⁸ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, MU 3 (Early Letters about Graves), “Correspondence – Fabian Ware to Arthur Stanley,” 10 May 1915, 3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

by this assertion that, in limited cases, he relaxed the strict enforcement of prohibiting risk-taking.⁵¹

Ultimately, the GRC and Ware started discussing the prospect of creating an official policy for completing grave work while exposed to fire. This also included instances of heavy fire and what Ware described as the poison zone. Although discussions were started in May 1915, officials quickly concluded that it was impossible to establish any type of policy or practice for any particular day as conditions changed day to day.⁵²

Fabian Ware was also concerned about bringing the body back home to be buried. Although Ware only mentioned returning bodies to England, the same policies would have applied to Canadian dead as well. Ware explained that the French had shown a great respect for graves thus far. However, he also posited that there may be some family members who wanted to return a loved one's body to Britain, rather than leave it for burial in France. Although Ware feared the pain and disappointment in reaction to not allowing bodies to be returned, he explained that General Joffre, of the French Army, had forbidden all exhumations and transportation of bodies on military grounds and public health grounds, a decision with which British military authorities concurred and enforced.⁵³

Since bodies were not to be transported back to Britain, the GRC needed to determine how burial sites and cemeteries were to be selected. Complicating policy developments on burial sites was the ongoing debate on a French law that sought to provide land for the purpose of burial of British soldiers killed on the front. By 24 June 1915, the

⁵¹ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, Folder GRC 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "Report of the work of the GRC," 21 August 1915, 6.

⁵² ⁵² CWGC Archives, Box 2029, MU 3 (Early Letters about Graves), "Correspondence – Fabian Ware to Arthur Stanley," 10 May 1915, 3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 7.

bill had been negotiated and drafted by French officials, and was awaiting approval from the Minister of Finance before being introduced to the French Chamber. Prior to this, British officials were required to apply to Maires or Sous-Prefets referring to graves and cemeteries. This was in accordance with earlier French laws dating back to 5 April 1884.⁵⁴

By 29 August 1915, General Routine Order 1104 was issued to the British armies, detailing an unofficially agreed upon procedure for selecting burial grounds and cemeteries. The procedure was in place pending the expected passage of the French Law of Appropriation for Burials.⁵⁵ It stipulated that the corps dealing with burials should consult French Officials to ensure that they met the conditions outlined for expropriation. Similarly, the different Prefets in France were instructed to work with the Grave Registration Commission in selecting cemeteries. To ensure rapid selection of cemeteries, the proposed site was to be marked on a large-scale map and submitted to the Grave Registration Commission. The commission, along with an official from the Conseil Departemental d'Hygiene, would then judge the suitability of the site. If the Conseil judged the site satisfactory, then burials could commence. In urgent cases, the Graves Registration Commission was to proceed as if the bill had already passed into law.⁵⁶

4.4 The GRC and Marking, Registering, and Photographing Graves

Along with the creation of an organizational structure, the GRC needed to create policies, practices, and contingencies relating to religion. Two examples of special

⁵⁴ CWGC Archives, DGRE 1 – 19 (SDC 4) – DGRE 2 (Land in France, Provision of), “Report – Graves Registration Commission,” 29 August 1915.

⁵⁵ The law is also referred to as the French Law, the Law for Providing Lands for the Burial of British Soldiers in France, the French December Law, and the French Law of 1915.

⁵⁶ CWGC Archives – DGRE 1 – 19 (SDC 4) – DGRE 2 (Land in France, Provision of), “Report – Graves Registration Commission,” 29 August 1915.

religious arrangements were the way in which graves were marked, particularly for Jewish and Indian graves. Originally, instead of crosses, a form of memorial was placed at the head of Jewish graves.⁵⁷ The memorial also needed to be approved by the chief Jewish Chaplain. Indian graves received similar care according to instructions from the Indian Army.⁵⁸ Marking graves proved to be a difficult task for GRC staff at times. Not only did they have to contend with the mobile aspects of the war, they also had to cope with those killed in No Man's Land as well as inaccurate information from reports on the dead. As such, policies to correct errors in marking and registering graves were quickly established by staff. Since GRC staff were not always the ones who erected a cross, an elaborate procedure was created to ensure the proper rendering of any inscription on crosses. Burial reports fell in three categories: grave sites where crosses had been erected by GRC staff, graves registered by GRC staff, and graves reported to GRC staff.⁵⁹

In cases where crosses had been erected by commission staff, the inscription used was the same as the one found on the existing, non-durable cross. In some cases, a cross might not have been present. Thus, a piece of paper with pertinent details was put inside a bottle, which was placed at the head of the grave. These details were then used to mark the grave. In other instances, a piece of wood with a written inscription was placed on graves. In cases where an inscription was found, either in a bottle or on a piece of wood, those inscriptions were used. The reason for these three instances was that GRC staff had

⁵⁷ While the report notes that special memorials were permitted, it does not describe what these special memorials over Jewish graves looked like. Furthermore, there are little references to special arrangements for non-Christian soldiers.

⁵⁸ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, Folder GRC 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "Report of the work of the GRC," 21 August 1915, 3-4.

⁵⁹ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, Folder GRC 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "Corrections of Inscriptions on Graves," No Date, 1.

typically already visited these grave sites and had done the work in marking the graves. However, GRC staff would also place crosses based on requests from a chaplain or a unit.⁶⁰

The second category of grave reports dealt with graves registered by GRC staff. When a grave with a cross was registered by commission staff, the name on the cross was taken as being correct.⁶¹ The likely reason behind this is that the details were provided by unit, chaplain, report, or details left at the grave site.

Moreover, in cases where a grave was only reported to GRC staff, the burial report was forwarded to the Adjutant-General's Branch (3rd Echelon) of the British Army. The GRC authority over identity was the report itself, which was sent to them by the unit or chaplain. In most cases, graves reported in this fashion could not always be visited by GRC staff and were more likely to contain incorrect information. After receiving the reports, the 3rd Echelon would return the reports to GRC headquarters for correction with a note detailing the reason for correction.⁶² In the end, the 3rd Echelon was the final authority in determining the correct inscription.

Correction reports from the Adjutant-General's Branch (3rd Echelon) could vary depending on the situation. Typically, the report would begin with a request to expunge the existing inscription and for the GRC to look into who was actually buried in the grave. The cross would then be amended where possible to reflect either an unknown, or with the proper name. Alternately, in cases where the man was found to be alive, the cross was removed completely and work was done to identify the individual buried.⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 2.

In addition to the headquarters and individual field sections, the GRC also discussed, and later created, a dedicated Enquiries and Photographic Section. In an undated report, likely from July or August 1915, military officials discussed creating an enquiries branch to deal with enquiries received regarding missing, wounded, or deceased soldiers. Following the creation of the GRC, staff and officials aimed to focus on grave work and stay away from enquiries. However, the commission was quickly inundated with requests, resulting in the need for a dedicated branch.⁶⁴ The discussions started by explaining that grave enquiries came from three sources: the Enquiry Office for Wounded and Missing, started by Lord Robert Cecil of the British Red Cross Society; officers and men on active service on the front; and the general public at home. The report contended that the number of enquiries had already overburdened GRC staff.⁶⁵

Although the GRC had received a great number of enquiry and photographic requests, estimated at approximately twenty a day, commission officials felt the task only required one dedicated clerk to take care of the requests. The clerk's tasks would consist of filing and classifying replies to enquiries. It was suggested that as enquiries were received, they should be checked against the index of graves registered, in order to ensure quicker response. In cases where the grave was not found in the index, it was explained that the either information had not been received on the grave yet, or that the grave had not been indexed. The enquiry was then sent to the relevant regional section commander to find out more information about the grave to supply to the enquirer.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, GRC 4 (War Establishment – Choice of sites for Cemeteries – Organization Tables – Officers' Duties – Military Rank), "Correspondence – Fabian Ware to The Adjutant-General," 27 September 1915.

⁶⁵ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, GRC 5 (Section for Dealing with Photographs and Enquiries), "Graves Registration Commission – Draft Scheme for Founding a Section for Dealing with Enquiries for Graves and Application for Photographs," No Date, 1.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

With respect to photographing graves and sending them to applicants, GRC staff had a much more difficult time establishing a section and following an established policy. The difficulty stemmed from the Adjutant-General's army-wide orders putting restrictions on the use of cameras at the front. In particular, the film in a camera needed to be sealed if pictures were to be taken. As staff typically went through two or three rolls of film per outing, this posed a problem as they would thus circumvent the AG's orders. Despite this, early efforts were discussed by GRC officials for alternative arrangements for photographing, through reports on the photographic section provide few details.⁶⁷

Since the work of the Enquiries Section and Photographs Section were similar – one dealt with giving a burial site location and the other dealt with providing a photograph of the grave – officials discussed combining them under one section. The general belief was that under one section, the work could be completed at the GRC headquarters, thereby increasing efficiency. However, conditions did not permit the actual development and printing of photographs to be done at the headquarters since the headquarters was mobile, and typically located at the front. As such, photographic development and printing was carried out at Boulogne, since the necessary equipment was already there. The films developed at Boulogne were to be shipped to the GRC headquarters and properly stored there.⁶⁸

During discussions to set up the GRC photographic section, staff had to contend with problems revolving largely around the lack of experience of those in the photographic section and lack of expectations from both GRC officials and civilians alike as to what was wanted out of a photograph. Moreover, procedures also needed to be created for how teams

⁶⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 3-4.

of GRC staff went out and photographed soldiers' graves. One early problem was that a majority of the graves were quite close to the active front lines. Furthermore, a considerable number of the graves in cemeteries away from the front only had a number attached to the cross with no name yet inscribed. During the discussion phase for the photographic section of the GRC, it was decided that taking photographs of a cross with a number and no name would serve no purpose for the GRC files, nor would it be satisfactory for applicants seeking a picture of their loved one's grave.⁶⁹

To better accommodate what GRC staff believed would be an influx of photograph requests, GRC staff initially discussed taking collective photos of cemeteries and groups of graves. Staff believed that after the functions of the GRC became common knowledge, civilians at home would inundate the commission with requests. Furthermore, in cases where there was still active fighting, commission staff mandated that photographers should be accompanied by officers responsible to the GRC. It was these officers' duty to communicate with the respective sections outlining proposed photographic work and to make a judgement relating to safety after arriving at the cemetery.⁷⁰

A later GRC report confirms that the Photographic Section was established, most likely in May 1915. The report, from 21 August 1915, detailed the establishment of the Photographic Section. Specifically, the report details that the GRC worked in conjunction with the British Red Cross Society to create the Photographic Section. The society provided funds to help establish the section, which, according to the report, evolved rapidly.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 5-6.

Furthermore, the public perception of the Photographic Section, at least in August 1915, was relatively positive.⁷¹

4.5 Passing the Torch: The Military Takeover of the GRC

Despite the relatively short period that the GRC existed, it was able to lay the foundations for soldier burials, grave marking and registration, land acquisition, and grave maintenance. However, the continued negotiations of the French bill on land acquisition for cemeteries caused British military authorities to re-think how they approached burials. Although the Graves Registration Commission was under the authority of the Adjutant-General's Branch, it was still born out of private efforts to ensure grave marking, registration, and maintenance with cooperation from the British military. As such, between September and December 1915, a conversion of the GRC was first outlined and later implemented by Fabian Ware. Through this process, the GRC first became a military entity, and was later reorganized as the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries (DGR&E).⁷²

The eventual GRC shift from the Red Cross to the British Army should not have been a surprise by October 1915. Throughout its brief existence, the GRC had enjoyed a bilateral relationship between the Red Cross and the Army. Though the Red Cross supplied the man-power and equipment needed to complete grave duties, the army was quick to absorb the costs.⁷³ Despite this, military and Red Cross officials started to raise the idea of

⁷¹ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, Folder GRC 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "Report of the work of the GRC," 21 August 1915, 5.

⁷² A further acronym for the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries was DGRE.

⁷³ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, GRC 4 (War Establishment – Choice of Site for Cemeteries – Organization: Tables – Officers' Duties – Military Rank), "Correspondence – Fabian Ware to the Adjutant-General," 27 September 1915.

complete military control of the Graves Registration Commission.⁷⁴ Compounding official thoughts on the GRC was the fact that there were men enlisted with the Red Cross who wished to enlist with the GRC under new conditions.⁷⁵

With the army officially taking over the Graves Registration Commission, some Red Cross personnel who had been working closely with the army in ensuring graves were identified and marked expressed a strong desire to break their contracts with the Red Cross and enlist with the British Army to continue their work. As Ware outlined in a letter to Arthur Stanley, most of these men were willing to go through with the work for the duration of the war.⁷⁶ In further correspondence, Ware explains to Stanley that some clerks, orderlies, and drivers in one of the Red Cross units had opted to resign their positions and enlist in the army. Others, who had wanted a contract extension, had changed their minds and enlisted in the army.⁷⁷

Other issues such as growing front-line work and the need for military oversight convinced the military to take full control of the GRC. By the end of August 1915, it appeared as though the French burial and expropriation law was going to pass. British military officials and Fabian Ware began discussing the future of the GRC and its activities. In a letter from Sir Neville Macready to the Secretary of the War Office, dated 6 September

CWGC Archives, Box 2028, Folder ADD 4/1/3 (Red Cross Record Office), File 388a (Mr Fabian Ware's Mobile Unit - 18 Nov 1914 to 5 Nov 1915), "Correspondence: Fabian Ware to Mr. Campbell – British Red Cross Society," 5 April 1915.

⁷⁴ CWGC Archives, Box 2028, Folder ADD 4/1/3 (Red Cross Record Office), File 388a (Mr Fabian Ware's Mobile Unit - 18 Nov 1914 to 5 Nov 1915), "Correspondence – British Red Cross Commissioner to Arthur Sloggett," 11 October 1915.

⁷⁵ CWGC Archives, Box 2028, Folder ADD 4/1/3 (Red Cross Record Office), File 388a (Mr Fabian Ware's Mobile Unit - 18 Nov 1914 to 5 Nov 1915), "Correspondence: Fabian Ware to Sir Arthur Stanley," 16 October 1915.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ CWGC Archives, Box 2028, Folder ADD 4/1/3 (Red Cross Record Office), File 388a (Mr Fabian Ware's Mobile Unit - 18 Nov 1914 to 5 Nov 1915), "Correspondence: Fabian Ware to Arthur Stanley," 21 October 1915.

1915, Macready explained that the French bill was progressing though the French Parliament. It was expected that the bill would quickly pass in the French Senate and be given Presidential assent soon after. French officials stipulated that all communications relating to graves should be between the French Government and a central authority.⁷⁸

Macready later alluded to the future duties of the GRC in his letter to the Secretary of War Office. He suggested that the commission should continue its work under the Adjutant-General's Branch and that all communication with the French or Belgian governments should be conducted by its staff, under the AG Branch. With this, the process of transferring full control of the GRC to the British Army commenced.⁷⁹

By late October 1915, control of the Graves Registration Commission had completely passed from a mixed Red Cross-Army entity to a completely British Army organization. In a letter to the Surgeon-General, Arthur Sloggett, the Commissioner for the British Red Cross and Order of St. John⁸⁰ explained that control of the Graves Registration Commission had passed into the hands of the Adjutant-General. It was further revealed that discussions between the Red Cross and British military officials had taken place at the prospect of the British Government taking over the duties of the Commission itself and making it a national project.⁸¹

⁷⁸ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, DGRE 1 – 19 (SDC 4), DGRE 2 (Land in France, Provision of), “Correspondence A. 6829 – Field Marshal Sir JDP French, to the Secretary, War Office,” 6 September 1915.

⁷⁹ Although the GRC was initially created under the Adjutant-Generals Branch, it was still a part of the British Red Cross Society. The Red Cross gave the manpower, while the British Military bore the cost of the GRC.

Ibid., Pg. 3.

CWGC Archives, Box 2028, Folder ADD 4/1/4 (Papers hand to Oliver Holt 25-7-58) “Correspondence – Fabian Ware to Major Campbell,” 7 December 1915.

⁸⁰ Although the letter does not give a signature for the letter, it is possibly written by Arthur Lawley. Similar letters list him as a Commissioner of the British Red Cross Society.

⁸¹ CWGC Archives, Box 2028, Folder ADD 4/1/3 (Red Cross Record Office), File 388a (Mr Fabian Ware's Mobile Unit - 18 Nov 1914 to 5 Nov 1915), “Correspondence – British Red Cross Commissioner to Arthur Sloggett,” 11 October 1915.

Under military control, the army made a more concerted effort to outline how bodies were to be cared for and buried on the front. General Routine Orders (GROs) contained more information related to last rites, cemeteries, and casualty clearing. In fact, the revised GRO manual issued to the British Army in the field contained a complete section entitled “Clearing a Battlefield,” describing how wounded and dead were to be treated after a battle.⁸² It also contained a section titled “Instructions Related to the Burial of British Soldiers,” which was published as GRO 1104 on 26 August 1915. The latter section detailed the recently agreed upon terms of the French Law regarding burials and cemeteries and outlined the function of the GRC within the army.⁸³

4.6 Directorate of Graves Registration & Enquiries

Despite the relative success of the GRC, changes were bound to happen after complete absorption into the military in October 1915. In fact, changes had already occurred within the GRC. The military was increasingly becoming involved with the GRC, as was evident with the number of GROs issued regarding the expected practice for burials and treatment of war dead. Moreover, Adjutant-General Neville Macready explained in September 1915 that due to the French burial law, the GRC should be incorporated into the British forces and enlisted for the special service of grave work.⁸⁴ By March 1916, Fabian Ware outlined in a letter to the Adjutant-General Macready that the Graves Registration

⁸² CWGC Archives, Box 2033, Folder DGRE 1-19 (SDC 4), File GRC 7 (Extracts from General Routine Orders 1st March 1915 – Extracts from General Routine Orders 1st December 1915 Parts 1 and 2), “Extracts from General Routine Orders Issued to the British Army in the Field – Field-Marshal Sir J. D. P. French – Part 1: Adjutant-General’s Branch,” 1 December 1915, 17-19

⁸³ Ibid. Pg. 19-21.

⁸⁴ CWGC Archives, Box 1085, Folder WG 1298 (Prince of Wales’ National Committee for the Care of Soldiers’ Graves), “Correspondence – Field Marshall Sir J. D. P. French to The Secretary of the War Office,” 6 September 1915, 4.

Commission, among other things, had changed its name and become the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries.⁸⁵ Further, Ware explained the continued success of the DGR&E and recent problems registering graves in exposed positions.

Subsequent letters explained that the work of graves registration had grown substantially, requiring a dedicated department under the Adjutant-General's Branch to be formed and staffed. Military officials also decided that the director and his office should be moved from the active front to London. At this time, the only one serious concern was how the staff work would be continued when the director was away. Despite this, military officials agreed that the director should complete his work in London as all alternatives were deemed less effective.⁸⁶

In order to register individual graves and graves in cemeteries, the Directorate needed units in the field. These became known as the Graves Registration Units (GRUs). These units were based on the former sections of the GRC. However, unlike the previous seven sections, there were only three inspectors to oversee all the GRUs, one each for the northern units, the southern units, and the lines of communication.⁸⁷ It was these GRUs that completed the bulk of the registration work and submitted burial and registration reports to the Directorate.

At the creation of the DGR&E, further initiatives were being sought by Ware to ensure the work of the Directorate was completed effectively and efficiently, while also maintaining a strong fighting force on the front. These initiatives also came about because

⁸⁵ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, Folder DGRE 1 – 19 (SDC 4) File DGRE 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "Correspondence Fabian Ware to the Adjutant-General," 2 March 1916.

⁸⁶ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, Folder DGRE 1 – 19 (SDC 4) File DGRE 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "Private Correspondence – No date", n.d.

⁸⁷ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, Folder DGRE 1 – 19 (SDC 4) File DGRE 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "Notes on Conference between Director, AAG and Colonel Messer," 19 September 1917.

of heavy fighting, particularly in the Somme starting in July 1916, the lack of a proper identification system for war dead, and the continued evolution of warfare and grave registration work as a result. The first initiative was the use of identity discs and dual-identity discs for burial purposes.

Though the identity disc was introduced into the British army in 1907, problems with how ID discs were used arose during the First World War. When a soldier was killed, the ID disc was, in many cases, removed and brought back to headquarters to report the death. The information was used to create the casualty reports and inform the Directorate and the soldier's family. However, in many cases, bodies were not buried for days, or even weeks. This was a result of heavy casualties, military advances, or orders from the Corps General for military reasons.⁸⁸

When burying parties were finally able to carry out their work, they ran into the problem of identifying bodies since ID discs and personal belongings had been removed. As a result, the DGR&E proposed the adoption of the two-disc system. This system was not new and had been employed by the French forces earlier in the War.⁸⁹ The scheme was introduced into the British Forces in Army Order 287/1916 in mid-1916. The idea behind the system was that one ID disc was removed from the body to confirm death, while the second disc was left on the body until the time of burial. Specifically, the lower disc, or Disc, Identity, No. 2 – Red, was removed and used to confirm the death. Disc, Identity, No. 1 – Green, was to be buried with the body. In the event that a body could not be brought back due to enemy fire, the red disc was still removed to ensure report of the death, but the

⁸⁸ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, Folder DGRE 1 – 19 (SDC 4) File DGRE 18 (Scheme for Duplicate Identity Discs), "Correspondence Major A. A. Messer for Adjutant-General," 16 May 1916.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

green disc remained with the body so that when it was found after fighting, it could be properly identified.⁹⁰

Another initiative that was debated in the early years of the DGR&E was the use of conscientious objectors (COs) in cemetery work. Employing conscientious objectors in graves work was ideal for Britain. These soldiers would typically be able to avoid active fighting, thus appeasing their objections. Further, conscientious objectors could replace non-conscientious objector soldiers who were conducting burials, freeing them to be deployed onto active battlefields, thus increasing manpower. On 1 June 1916, Fabian Ware wrote to one of the Officers Commanding of a Grave Registration Unit (GRU) about the work being completed in France. In it, Ware brought up the prospect of using conscientious objectors in cemetery work. Ware explained that “the conscientious objector question is a biggish thing over here” and explained that he needed to raise the issue with General Fowke. He requested that A. A. Messer, the Officer Commanding of the GRU, have a report ready showing the number of men required for cemetery work. This would allow Ware to give a clearer picture to Fowke. Despite Ware’s efforts, it appears the conscientious objector idea was never implemented as no reply to Ware’s request was ever filed.⁹¹

Because of problems with burials, particularly after the First Battle of the Somme, Directorate officials circulated the idea of raising a permanent force to clear battlefields and bury the dead. The force was to be stationed either at General Headquarters - Troops

⁹⁰ It is important to note that any soldier who was not wearing their ID discs were charged under military code for breach of discipline.

CWGC Archives, Box 2029, Folder DGRE 1 – 19 (SDC 4) File DGRE 18 (Scheme for Duplicate Identity Discs), “Note from Fabian Ware,” 23 September 1916.

⁹¹ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, Folder DGRE 1 – 19 (SDC 4) File DGRE 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), “Correspondence Fabian Ware to A. A. Messer – OC GR Units,” 1 June 1916.

(GHQ Troops) or in a location convenient to active zones. In a memorandum, A. A. Messer suggested that the permanent force of those not in use. Messer notes that the likely troops would be either black troops or Chinese labourers and further suggested that non-combatants must not be used for this work. Further, Messer stipulated that the burial force should be concentrated as one large unit. This was purely for efficiency's sake as Messer believed it would be difficult to get the right number of troops in the right zones when work was being completed if the force was split up. When deployed, these men would be charged to the officer appointed by the Corps or Division. The Corps or Division would be tasked with rationing and discipline.⁹²

A. A. Messer's permanent force suggestion was raised at a 4th Army Headquarters Meeting on 2 August 1916. The meeting was planned to review possible changes that could be made to improve the work of clearing battlefields and burying the dead. Military officials during the 4th Army Headquarters meeting raised the issue that, as manpower was lacking, the work was being completed as effectively as possible. Further, delays were typically a result of what were deemed military situations – particularly active and exposed zones where bodies lay.⁹³

However, the suggestion to appoint a permanent force met with stiff opposition. The point was raised that soldiers took pride in burying their own, and felt they owed it their comrades to give them a final resting place. Fourth Army officials suggested that if black soldiers were seen carrying out this work, it would leave a very bad taste in other

⁹² CWGC Archives, Box 2029, Folder DGRE 1 – 19 (SDC 4) File DGRE 7 (Burial Companies and Corps, Formation of), “Memorandum – Major A. A. Messer – OC Graves Registration Units,” 1 August 1916.

⁹³ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, Folder DGRE 1 – 19 (SDC 4) File DGRE 7 (Burial Companies and Corps, Formation of), “Meeting of the 4th Army,” 2 August 1916.

soldiers' mouths since they were not completing the work themselves. As a result, the matter of a permanent force was left alone and does not appear to have been raised again.⁹⁴

The Battle of the Somme proved to be a substantial setback for both the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries and the work it sought to complete. In fact, Fabian Ware outlined the problems he saw for the Directorate and the work it was completing:

We are on the verge over here of serious trouble about the number of bodies lying out still unburied on the Somme battlefields. The soldiers returning wounded or on leave to England are complaining bitterly about it [...] There is every reason to expect that the question may be raised in Parliament any day and I do not see that defence the Government could offer for the neglect of the Army in the field in this connection. We of course have no responsibility in the matter but I feel most strongly that a lot of the good impression our work has created will be undone if a public scandal should arise in regard to this [...].⁹⁵

Though the Directorate was not responsible for the actual burial of bodies, Ware's comments outline the need to reorganize the way in which soldiers' bodies were buried during the war and how large numbers of bodies were buried during large offensives.

Until the Somme, each unit had been responsible for completing burials of their fallen while Graves Registration Units recorded the grave information. However, the substantial losses suffered at the Somme proved that the current system was not suitable when there were immense losses. Fabian Ware himself wrote in 1917 that

At the beginning of the Somme offensive last year I called at the Fourth Army H.Q. and saw General Sutton [and Col. Whitehead] with regard to this question of burials. There was no organisation for the purpose of the time and I was satisfied after having discussed the matter with them that it was impossible to establish any proper organisation at that time in the middle of severe fighting. Subsequently the organisation of Corps Burial Officers was established.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, Folder DGRE 1 – 19 (SDC 4) File DGRE 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "Correspondence Fabian Ware to Captain Cornock Taylor – DGR&E," 29 June 1917.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Burials in the field were conducted more smoothly after the creation of the Corps Burial Officers. Ultimately, the establishment of the Corps Burial Officers should be seen as a compromise between the need by army officials to clear battlefields and the desire of units to bury their own dead. Since the corps and divisional burial officers were attached to the army, they will be analysed more in-depth in the following chapter.

While army burial officers oversaw the transportation of remains to the site of a new burial ground, the survey officer was tasked with searching the area and reporting the findings to the burial officer. Findings might include recommendations on where searches for graves or reburials should take place. Survey officers were also tasked with laying out the concentration cemeteries – cemeteries that were established to concentrate the bodies of soldiers from surrounding cemeteries deemed temporary. The survey officer pegged the cemetery site into rows of graves, which had been planned out by DGR&E staff and would complete the final report once a cemetery had been completed.⁹⁷

While progress was being made in refining the duties of the Directorate, politicians and military officials were beginning to look ahead to the end of the war. Specifically, once the war was over, what organization would be tasked with maintaining the graves that the DGR&E had created, registered, and cared for during the war. As a result, British parliamentarians began looking at creating a public commission to take over the duties of the DGR&E once fighting had ceased.

4.7 Forethought to the Care and Maintenance at the End of the War

⁹⁷ John Starling and Ivor Lee, *No Labour, No Battle: Military Labour During the First World War* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Spellmount, 2009), 368-369.

While the military took over the original Graves Registration Commission and transformed it into the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries, there was a concerted effort in Britain to create a civilian-led organization for graves registration. Although the French Law forced all enquiries to go through one central organization in the British Army during the war, the law only vaguely referred to a central organization recognized by the governments after the war. The wartime organization, originally to be the Graves Registration Commission, later became the DGR&E upon re-organization. However, there were no procedures outlined as to who was to take over the duties after the war. As a result, British politicians started looking into a government-sanctioned public organization to take over the care and maintenance of graves after the war. This started out as the Prince of Wales' National Committee for the Care of Soldiers' Graves, but ultimately became the more recognized Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC).⁹⁸

The birth of an Imperial War Graves Commission dates to the end of 1915. General Sir Neville Macready brought up the issue of private societies honouring war dead to the Secretary of the War Office in September 1915. The main problem was Article Five of the French law which vaguely referred to "associations regularly constituted both in France and in the Allied countries."⁹⁹ The fear was that once the French Law was enacted, many societies would come into being and claim recognition under the law.¹⁰⁰ As Macready wrote, and Field Marshal French agreed, "the future care of the resting places of the country's dead should not be entrusted to any Society, however prominent but should be

⁹⁸ The Imperial War Graves Commission is now known as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission after changing its name to better reflect the Commonwealth in 1960.

⁹⁹ CWGC Archives – Box 1085, File WG 1298 (Prince of Wales' National Committee for the Care of Soldiers' Graves), "Correspondence – Field Marshall Sir J. D. P. French to The Secretary of the War Office," 6 September 1915.

¹⁰⁰ At this point in time, the French Law was still just a bill since it had not finished passing through all levels of the French Legislature. However, it is being referred to as the law for simplicity.

in the hands of a national committee constituted by, and working directly under, Government authority.”¹⁰¹ Macready also believed that the committee should largely be dormant during hostilities and should only become active when the time came for permanent memorials to be erected and for graves to be tended to. The idea was that, following the war, the committee would be the only recognized authority responsible for British graves.¹⁰²

By January 1916, the Prince of Wales’ Committee for the Care of Soldiers’ Graves was appointed by the British Government with Edward, Prince of Wales, serving as president. One of the first Committee meetings was held on 27 March 1916 and included Fabian Ware as the DGR&E representative. Ware provided an update on the work of the Directorate. Although some cemetery boundaries had already been set, Ware explained that soldiers buried just outside those boundaries would be disinterred and brought within the cemeteries. Ware’s update seemed to satisfy the Committee as it quickly moved on to the question of permanent memorials.¹⁰³

The largest problem addressed by the Committee related to memorials placed at the graves of each cemetery. Sir Lionel Earle raised the issue of members of the public who wished to erect their own effigies for loved ones and how such a practice would lead to unsuitable memorials. Ware explained that private citizens had already started asking the chaplains of different units in the area to order effigies from local French people. However, the desired practice was that all graves would be uniform in the cemeteries with only subtle

¹⁰¹ CWGC Archives – Box 1085, File WG 1298 (Prince of Wales’ National Committee for the Care of Soldiers’ Graves), “Correspondence – Field Marshall Sir J. D. P. French to The Secretary of the War Office.” 6 September 1915.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰³ CWGC Archives – Box 1085, File WG 1298 (Prince of Wales’ National Committee for the Care of Soldiers’ Graves), “National Committee for the Care of Soldiers’ Graves in France and Belgium – Minutes of a Meeting held at H. M. Office of Works on Monday March 27th, 1916.” 27 March 1916.

differences for simplicity's sake and to help preserve the principle of equality among men. As a way to appease the public, the National Committee representatives discussed the prospect of allowing the public to erect memorials to honour all those buried within the cemetery instead of isolating certain individuals. Ultimately, the military and the National Committee both agreed to a permanent ban on monuments during the war.¹⁰⁴

Though the bulk of the National Committee meetings dealt with the makeup of the Committee, tasks to be accomplished, and updates on the process of the DGR&E, significant progress was made in attempting to quell public dissent around the decision not to allow temporary memorials during the war and to use only standardized memorials after the war. Although the Committee was originally constituted to care for the graves of British soldiers, it started taking on additional roles. These included an imperial fund to pay for memorials after the conclusion of hostilities. The fund was a way to appease private individuals who were discontented with the decision to ban temporary memorials.¹⁰⁵

Despite the addition of the Imperial Fund, the Prince of Wales National Committee remained fairly dormant during its early years. The only exception was during the period prior to the Imperial Conference in 1917. In an attempt to bring the British Dominions into the fold, the High Commissioners of each British Dominion and a representative of the Government of India were added as representatives to the National Committee. However, this brought into question the overall foundation of the Committee and whether it should be more of an Imperial institution than a British government institution.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ CWGC Archives, Box 1001, File WQ 8 Part 1 (Imperial Commission Part 1), "Imperial Fund for the Care of Soldiers' Graves – Proposal for Imperial Commission," No Date, 5.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Due to the evolving responsibilities taken on by the Prince of Wales Committee, it quickly became apparent to the representatives of the National Committee that the roles and responsibilities required of a burial organization extended any mandate that could be established within a National Committee. Instead, because of the Imperial nature the committee was undertaking, the representatives on the National Committee decided that an Imperial Commission should be established. As a result, the representatives brought a proposal forward just prior to the Imperial Conference in March 1917. The proposal noted, among other things, that the National Committee required imperial jurisdiction due to the increased role Dominion troops had taken during the war effort, which resulted in more Dominion troops perishing. Because of the increased losses suffered by Dominion troops their governments, had taken a direct interest in the work of the Directorate of Graves Registration & Enquiries. Further, the National Committee explained that a formal Imperial Commission needed to be established before the end of the war to eliminate any break in the continuity of burying war dead. The fear among committee members was that Britain would repeat its mistakes following the Crimean War when, nearly twenty years after the conclusion of hostilities, it became known that graves from that war had not been cared for in the slightest.¹⁰⁷

As a result, there was a concerted push by the Prince of Wales' National Committee to take over some functions of the DGR&E. The idea quickly caught on. Further, since the High Commissioners of the Dominions had already been appointed to the National Committee, questions of Dominion representation had already been taken care of.¹⁰⁸ As a

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 3

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

result, it was agreed by committee members and military officials that the proposal would be brought before the Imperial War Conference in March 1917.

As the National Committee was preparing to bring the proposal to the Imperial Conference, Ware worked tirelessly to inform each of the High Commissioners of the Dominions, high-ranking military officials, and British politicians of the need to go forward with an Imperial Commission.¹⁰⁹ Through these efforts, Ware received positive responses from all involved. When the proposal itself was brought before the Imperial Conference, it was quickly agreed upon and given royal assent.¹¹⁰ Within two months, on 10 May 1917, the Imperial War Graves Commission was established under royal decree.¹¹¹

On 20 November 1917, the IWGC held its first meeting, discussing largely procedural matters such as appointments. However, the meeting also addressed what eventually became the Commission's main focus: laying out cemeteries in France and Belgium.¹¹² The Canadian representative, George Perley, seconded the resolution stating that "he was sure that the setting up of this Imperial Commission, charged with the sacred duty of caring for the graves of our sailors and soldiers, would still further promote the closer co-operation and better understanding between the different parts of the Empire which would be the result of the present war."¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ CWGC Archives, Box 1001, File WQ 8 Part 1 (Imperial Commission Part 1), "Proposal for Imperial Commission," n.d.

¹¹⁰ CWGC Archives, Box 1001, File WQ 8 Part 2 (Imperial Commission Part 2), "Imperial War Graves Commission – Draft Charter," n.d.

¹¹¹ CWGC Archives, Box 2028, File ADD 4/1/6 (Graves Registration Commission – Grants, Photographic Stores and Cars – Drawing Office at Boulogne – Care of Cemeteries and Graves, Gardening, Contracts, Graves of Red Cross Personnel), "Transmitting the Draft of a Charter of Incorporation to be granted to "The Imperial War Graves Commission," 10 May 1917.

¹¹² Each representative from the meeting was also known as an Imperial War Graves Commission commissioner. LAC, Department of External Affairs Fonds, RG 25 Box 335, File 18-26 Part 42 (Canada House Papers), "First Imperial War Graves Commission meeting," 20 November 1917.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

4.8 Changes for the Directorate After the Creation of the Commission

With the creation of the Imperial War Graves Commission, the duties assigned to the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries, and subsequently its Grave Registration Units, were re-organized to allow for a smooth transition from the wartime organizations to the Commission at the end of the war. As such, there was a greater degree of collaboration between the Directorate and the Commission. The Commission adopted the same framework and founding principles as the Directorate. These included the belief that all those who fell should be treated equally and that isolated burials should be consolidated into selected cemeteries at the end of the war.¹¹⁴ However, the Directorate was significantly altered to allow Commission work to begin, most notably surrounding the central Commission pillar of equality of treatment.

Historian Jenny Edkins posits further changes regarding burials after the transition from the Directorate to the Commission. Efforts to provide equal treatment marked a sharp parting from earlier established traditions. Specifically, she notes that the transition was a “radical departure from earlier tradition, when officers had been buried in individual graves and men in mass graves.” As a result, this became one of the key principles in guiding the work of the IWGC.¹¹⁵

The biggest change to the DGR&E was that it was relegated to technical matters. Further, control of the Graves Registration Units was taken away from the Directorate and given to the Army.¹¹⁶ Though peculiar on the surface, delegating the GRUs to the Army

¹¹⁴ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C4 Box 4301, Folder 2 File 11 (6th Brigade CFA Burials 26/7/1916 to 26/12/1918), “Imperial War Graves Commission – *Cemeteries and Graves*,” n.d.

¹¹⁵ Edkins, *Missing*, 138.

¹¹⁶ CWGC Archives, Box 2033, Folder DGRE 1-19 (SDC 4) File DGRE 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), “Private Correspondence: Fabian Ware to Cazalet,” 10 May 1917.

made sense. First, the IWGC was based in London and had not yet been involved with either burials or registrations. Moreover, the Army had been taking care of burials. However, the Battle of the Somme had shown the inherent problems facing the Army with regard to conducting burials during heavy fighting. As a result, linking the GRUs with the Army and its burial officers created a more efficient system for burying and registering graves.

Further to the GRUs being taken over by the Army, the Directorate also divested its responsibilities for surveying land for cemeteries. Upon the reorganization of the Graves Registration Commission into the Directorate, the British Army had supplied a small survey staff for the purposes of registering graves in cemeteries. However, after the creation of the Imperial War Graves Commission, attempts were being made by Commission officials to do complete surveys of closed cemeteries well behind the active lines. The theory among IWGC officials was to use the period of demobilisation after the war to complete the layouts of cemeteries, including beautification. Although it was felt that the Commission should complete the beautification work, surveys were still needed of the cemeteries.

Thus, the Directorate turned, again, to the British Red Cross Society. A proposal was put forward that a Drawing Office be established in Boulogne and consist of Red Cross personnel to put in place the plans, details, and specifications already held by the Directorate Survey Office regarding cemeteries. Further, architects and draughtsman could also be placed in this office for future use. After a short period of time, the drawing office would then be absorbed into the IWGC, once the war was over and time permitted the

transfer.¹¹⁷ The proposal was well received by the Red Cross. Sir Robert Hudson agreed that the undertaking was necessary, but suggested that it needed to be incorporated into the Commission minutes to be submitted to the Finance Committee.¹¹⁸ The proposal made its way to Sir Arthur Lawley, the Commissioner of the British Red Cross, who, despite signalling his concern that such an office would be more expensive than anticipated, wholly agreed to the proposal.¹¹⁹

The Directorate's attention shifted to writing technical documents outlining procedures that had been followed thus far and establishing reference material for moving forward with burying soldiers and marking graves. The material published by the DGR&E resembled the previous Army Standing Orders manuals, but focused solely on the burial aspect, something the previous manuals had largely neglected. The DGR&E Instructional Booklet was published in June 1917, followed by the Technical Booklet in February 1918. The booklets offered detailed burial and marking information along with the duties to be performed by chaplains and how to handle enemy graves.

Large-scale changes did not take effect within the Directorate until the end of the war. At this stage, there was a change in priorities from burying new dead to finding bodies that had never been buried throughout the entire conflict. On 7 March 1919, a memorandum was sent to the officer in charge of records – Overseas Military Forces of Canada detailing the policy to be followed in regards to the maintenance of graves.

¹¹⁷ CWGC Archives, Box 2028, File ADD 4/1/6 (Red Cross Record Office File 390: Graves Registration Commission - 19 Oct 1917 to 9 June 1919), "Correspondence from Fabian Ware to Sir Robert Hudson," 15 October 1917.

¹¹⁸ CWGC Archives, Box 2028, File ADD 4/1/6 (Red Cross Record Office File 390: Graves Registration Commission - 19 Oct 1917 to 9 June 1919), "Correspondence from Sir Robert Hudson to Fabian Ware." 16 October 1917.

¹¹⁹ CWGC Archives, Box 2028, File ADD 4/1/6 (Red Cross Record Office File 390: Graves Registration Commission - 19 Oct 1917 to 9 June 1919), "Correspondence from Sir Arthur Lawley to B. E. Mayhew." 23 October 1917.

Specifically, the Directorate, in each theatre of war, was employed provisionally to complete established cemeteries and provide for the registration of all graves. When this work was completed, it was expected that the Imperial War Graves Commission would assume the maintenance of graves and be responsible for the permanent memorials, both in Britain and in the theatres of war.¹²⁰

Although this policy appears to have been followed after the war, substantial changes came by 1920. A report from 15 December 1920 outlined the duties assigned to the Directorate. The report broke down the duties of the Directorate into sections. The first section dealt with grave registration in an active Theatres of War, specifically focusing on coordinating information received from chaplains and other military officials. Information included burial reports and relevant incoming information along with outgoing information, such as requests for photographs of details of a death. Moreover, it prepared the location sheets of casualties, examined preliminary and comprehensive reports, and distributed unregistered information throughout the theatres of war. Finally, the section researched names where graves were not known, researched where graves were located but cross-particulars did not establish a definitive identity, and conducted quality control of burial sites to ensure no individual had more than one cross.¹²¹

The last two sections of the Directorate ultimately handed over their work to the Imperial War Graves Commission before the end of the war. The second section dealt primarily with graves registration in the United Kingdom and other locations outside of the

¹²⁰ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 1084, File G-37-4 (Graves Registration – Establishment), “Correspondence: Brigadier-General Blunder – Deputy Director-General of Graves Registration and Enquiries to The Officer i/c Records – Overseas Military Forces of Canada,” 7 March 1919.

¹²¹ CWGC Archives, Box 2033, File ADD 1/3/4 (Taking over of DGR&E by IWGC), “Report on the London Office of the DGR&E,” 15 December 1920.

theatres of war. However, large parts of this section were not handed over to the Commission until May 1920. This included the 518 cemeteries that were not in a theatre of war. The third section, which received and answered enquiries, was given to the Commission in July 1919. Typically, enquiries were received asking if an individual's grave had been located, to dispute the identity of a grave, to request a headstone inscription, or to note visitation to a certain grave. Moreover, officials dealing with enquiries took over the responsibility of notifying next of kin once a grave had been found, or once it had been properly identified.¹²²

Proposals were also made in regards to what the Commission could take over from the Directorate right away. Ware forwarded notes on the prospective transfer of duties to Lieutenant-General Sir G. M. W. MacDonogh, the Adjutant-General of the British Army, in 1920. In these notes, Ware specifies that the Registrar's Department, which completed the records of graves, the United Kingdom Graves Department, the Notifications Department, and the Photographic Department could all be taken over the Commission by the end of 1920.¹²³

Despite the discussions about what the Imperial War Graves Commission could take over from the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries, recommendations were also made by IWGC officials for the reorganization of the branch structure of the Directorate. In a report on the London Office of the Directorate, a recommendation was made by Ware to split the functions of A Branch, which focused on graves registration duties in theatres of war, into two Branches, A and D. A Branch would continue the duties

¹²² *Ibid.*, 4.

¹²³ CWGC Archives, Box 2033, File ADD 1/3/4 (Taking over of DGR&E by IWGC), "Correspondence: Fabian Ware to Sir G. M. W. MacDonogh," 22 December 1920.

of coordinating information, examining the preliminary reports and translating the information onto card indexes, distributing all information related to unidentified graves or graves not marked by GRUs, and removing duplicate crosses in cemeteries. Meanwhile, D Branch would be responsible for the preparation of grave location sheets, checking the comprehensive reports and verifying cemetery site plans, and researching names where a grave had not been registered and graves where the particulars did not definitively establish an identity. The reason behind the breakup of A Branch had more to do with administrative purposes and the fact that it was deemed too large for proper supervision.¹²⁴

Despite divesture, the potential for reorganization, and preparing to be subsumed into the Commission, the Directorate continued its original task of identifying and registering graves, after the war focusing on unknown graves and missing soldiers. With the conclusion of hostilities and the demobilisation of men, the Directorate was the key institution in searching the former battlefields for 'lost bodies.' These were soldiers who had been lost during the war, but whose bodies had never been found or burials that had properly taken place, but been lost in later operations. Because of the intense fighting in certain areas, particularly the Somme, concerted searches could not be completed as manpower was needed for active service. As a result, the influx of manpower at the end of the war allowed the Army and the Directorate to coordinate search efforts for the bodies. Each week, these 'lost bodies' were being found at a rate of approximately 600 a week, which continued until the Directorate's personnel strength was reduced. Even after that, bodies were still being found at a rate of 200 per week.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Ibid., Pg. 7.

¹²⁵ CWGC Archives, Box 2033, File ADD 1/3/4 (Taking over of DGR&E by IWGC), "Correspondence: Fabian Ware to The Secretary – Treasury – Whitehall," 16 August 1921.

Ultimately, at an IWGC conference between Major-General Sir Fabian Ware, the head of the IWGC, and British military representatives (Lieutenant-General Sir G. M. Macdonogh, Adjutant-General, Major-General B.F. Burnett-Hitchcock, and Miss S.A.M. Allen, Private Secretary to the Adjutant-General), it was decided that the IWGC would in fact take over all parts of the Directorate, including the Effects Branch. Originally, the idea that the Effects Branch be absorbed by the C.2 Casualties department of the British Army was brought up at an IWGC conference in December 1920, but conference participants realized that the more efficient route was to have the Directorate integrated into the IWGC as one entity. The only work that the Commission would not take over was exhumations, which were given to the army upon condition that they maintain exhumation parties in France and Belgium. All work of the Directorate was to be completed by 31 March 1921, when the Commission would have completed the takeover.¹²⁶

4.9 Changes for the Grave Registration Units after the Creation of the Commission

The Grave Registration Units (GRUs) remained a static establishment within the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries. Taken from the former sections of the GRC, the GRUs were assigned defined areas on the Western Front to conduct their work. Despite the relatively unchanging nature of the units, the founding of the IWGC and breakdowns in areas with heavy fighting signalled the need to improve the GRUs.

Beyond the creation of the Corps and Divisional Burial Officers and the transfer of the GRUs from the DGR&E to the Army, the biggest change to the functions of the GRUs occurred after the formal establishment of the IWGC. In order A.Q. 28-54, which was sent

¹²⁶ CWGC Archives, Box 2033, File ADD 1/3/4 (Taking over of DGR&E by IWGC), "Conference held in A. G.'s Room," 23 December 1920.

to all Canadian infantry brigades on 9 June 1917, the Grave Registration Units were reorganized into mobile and stationary units. The intention behind this was to have the stationary units allotted to the lines of communication while the mobile units were attached to different battalions. While mobile units could continue to register graves of the fallen, stationary units could establish new permanent cemeteries while also maintaining existing cemeteries. Further, by establishing a framework for the creation and maintenance of cemeteries, the transition period from DGR&E oversight to IWGC oversight could proceed efficiently at the end of the war.¹²⁷

Order A.Q. 28-54 specified the later function of the DGR&E and stationary grave registration units as being purely administrative, while the Directorate was to look after technical details. The change in function of the stationary graves registration units was in line with changes in the Directorate as a whole, which was beginning to focus on technical details in anticipation of the IWGC taking over policy and procedural duties. These technical details included the registration and marking of graves, the selection of cemeteries, planning, upkeep and control of cemeteries, photographing graves, planting flowers and shrubs, constructing memorials, and commemorative ceremonies. This allowed the mobile units to focus on the active cemeteries instead of the rear-area cemeteries. In addition, the order stipulated that cemeteries at the front might be transferred from mobile units to stationary units upon consultation between army commanders and the DGR&E.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4045 Folder 3 File 4 (Burials and Cemeteries – 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade, 1st Canadian Division), “Correspondence: A.Q. 28-54,” 9 June 1917.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

A peculiar reference appears in historical records of the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade, 3rd Canadian Division. Despite previously stating the continued progress made toward enhancing burial practices during the war, it appears there were also isolated cases in which burial policy and registration procedures regressed. An order from 20 April 1917 stated that the work being carried out by the Divisional Registration Officer would cease on that day. Further, military formations, be it corps or divisional formations, were required to take the necessary steps to ensure the work of burying war dead continued.¹²⁹ The likely reason for this was that other officers were taking over the registration duties from the divisional registration officer – likely one embedded within the 3rd Division. However, there is no further information available to explain the need to eliminate the divisional registration officer position, especially when the new system was working quite well. Nonetheless, instances such as this one help to illuminate the chaos that ensued when trying to ensure burials and registration of bodies took place.

In addition to Grave Registration Stationary Units being tasked with the care of cemeteries on 9 June 1917, specific individuals were given authority. Reference is made to Town Majors in order A.6.88-64 for the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade, 1st Canadian Division, stipulating that Town Majors were required to maintain cemeteries as of July 1917.¹³⁰ Thus, at least for a short time, cemeteries were maintained both by individual combat units and by Grave Registration Stationary Units. The likely explanation for this has to do with the role of Town Majors, who were responsible for the relations between

¹²⁹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4152, Folder 1 File 7 (7th Canadian Infantry Brigade 3rd Canadian Division Burials and Cemeteries), "Correspondence: Q/3/C. 9 From Captain G. G. Blackstock," 20 April 1917.

¹³⁰ A town major was the chief executive officer of a garrison town or fortress. LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4045, Folder 3 File 4 (Burials and Cemeteries – 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade, 1st Canadian Division), "Correspondence: A.6.88-64," 1 July 1917.

the Army and local civilians, and for the billeting of soldiers in a town or village. Town Majors were likely responsible in cases where the army took over either an entire cemetery, or a portion of the cemetery to be used for burials.

As the war progressed, so too did the mechanism for burying and recording graves of soldiers. This should not come as a shock due to the sheer number of casualties in the First World War. To say that there was no consistent policy in regard to recording the dead before 1917 would be wrong, as was clearly shown through Fabian Ware's command of the mobile ambulance unit. However, one can still argue that following the establishment of the IWGC, a clearer, more coherent and well established policy and program was put in place for burying soldiers and registering graves. In addition, credit cannot be entirely attributed to the IWGC since the entire process of registering burials had been continuously evolving since official recognition of Ware's registration work in 1915. Despite being an important influence in maintaining grave records, the supervisory organizations, such as the DGR&E, were not always present in the field to determine locations for cemeteries, or the process by which soldiers would be buried. For the most part, until later in the war the Graves Registration Units were responsible for the establishment of cemeteries, ensuring the burial of soldiers, and tending to the treatment of soldiers' remains in the battlefield.

4.10 The Imperial War Graves Commission and Equality of Treatment

The Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) has been well covered by historians, but an overview of the Commission and its relative importance to grave identification and registration policies is appropriate. The creation of the Imperial War Graves Commission can be seen as the evolution of war graves registration and the

surrounding policies. All aspects of war graves registration had been or were being addressed as the war continued. The IWGC addressed the final aspect left unanswered – how graves would be cared for after the war and the continued work that would be needed following the cessation of hostilities. With the Commission came new policies but also new debates, and even controversies.

One of the first tasks the Commission tackled was what form of permanent memorial would be employed over soldiers' graves, and in cemeteries in general. Throughout the war, wooden crosses were used to denote the graves of fallen soldiers. However, by January 1918, the IWGC started exploring the idea of uniform headstones for each grave. Lord Derby initially thought that headstones should only have one difference – the regimental badge. However, this view was not universally accepted and input from each colonel of all regiments was requested. Derby further thought that the actual form of the headstone itself. Although officials wanted a uniform headstone, there could be some very minor differences. Most notably, in the early discussions of headstones, there was a general acceptance that some headstones may have a square top, while other may have a rounded top. Despite this, each regiment would still have identical headstones for its fallen soldiers.¹³¹

Debate over the headstones also related to the broader IWGC policy of Equality of Treatment, which was contentious when it first emerged. Following the Imperial Conference of 1918, a Memorandum detailing the work of the Imperial War Graves Commission was drafted and submitted throughout British military and political circles. Although the first page of the memorandum was the typical historical background of what

¹³¹ CWGC Archives, Box 2059, File ADD 1/1/5 (Headstones – Documents), “Lord Derby – Imperial War Graves Commission,” January 1918.

led to the Commission, as well as the senior appointments, the second page began to outline new policies and principles adopted by the Commission. The most important, yet most contentious, was the ‘Equality of Treatment’ principle laid down by the IWGC. Through it, other practices such as the uniformity of headstones, common memorials to *all* soldiers, and the continued maintenance of IWGC cemeteries were introduced by IWGC officials and to the public.¹³²

‘Equality of Treatment’ was the defining principle among IWGC officials for how soldiers’ bodies were to be treated after death. Although Fabian Ware had worked to apply this principle in both the GRC and DGR&E, the IWGC formally recognized it as a way to equally commemorate all soldiers, Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) and Officers. Despite its adoption by the Commission, the policy itself was hotly contested.

For the Equality of Treatment policy, April and May 1920 saw large-scale debate about whether or not the policy itself should be kept, or scrapped for one that paid tribute to soldiers’ sacrifice individually instead of soldiers’ sacrifice collectively. On 24 April 1920, MP William Burdett-Coutts submitted a Statement of Reasons in the British House of Commons in support of Equality of Treatment. The statement itself outlined the two proposals on how to approach Equality of Treatment. The first was to remain with the status quo and support Equality of Treatment. With this, each cemetery would have a large Cross of Sacrifice in a prominent position as well as a Stone of Remembrance. Each headstone would have the name, number, regiment, army rank, regimental badge, date of death, and

¹³² CWGC Archives, Box 1001, File WG 8/1 (Imperial War Conference 1918), “Work of the Imperial War Graves Commission – Memorandum Prepared for the Vice-Chairman of the Commission,” 3 June 1918.

symbol of faith. The alternative proposal stated that the principle should be abandoned in lieu of individual monuments of a relative's choosing over each grave of a fallen soldier.¹³³

The statement of reason on the IWGC proposal caused many debates over IWGC policies in the British Parliament, including the Equality of Treatment practice. It touched on memorials, crosses, removal of temporary crosses, and other delicate topics that the Commission had sought to address after coming into existence. On 23 March 1920, a proposal was submitted by Burdett-Coutts that private memorials for fallen relatives be allowed, subject to the regulations of the Commission. Debate ensued at the Parliamentary session on 24 April 1920 between four members of parliament (Lord Robert Cecil, Burdett-Coutts, Bonar Law, and Viscount Wolmer). However, it was unsuccessful, and was ultimately re-assigned for debate on a Supply Day, a day allocated to the official opposition of parliament. It was, however, agreed that a free vote would take place on this issue.¹³⁴ Supplemental documents from the debate outline a plethora of reasons in support of the IWGC and Equality of Treatment. These documents, likely prepared by Burdett-Coutts and presented during the supply day, give insight from a wide range of advocates of the policy, including the Dominions, troops both abroad and demobilised, trade unions, and various other interest groups.

The Dominions widely supported Equality of Treatment and unanimously accepted its adoption. Robert Borden, Prime Minister of Canada, stated that it was "entirely appropriate that among the ranks of the dead there should be no distinction."¹³⁵ Upon debate of the principle in the British Parliament, the Dominions retained their belief that

¹³³ CWGC Archives, Box 2059, File ADD 1/1/5 (Headstones – Documents), "War Graves – Statement of Reasons in support of the Proposal of the Imperial War Graves Commission," 24 April 1920.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

equality of treatment was a far better approach to burials than any alternative, something that George Perley, High Commissioner of Canada, reiterated on 21 April 1920 in a letter published in *The Times*.

Along with the Dominions, troops stationed abroad also weighed in on how the Commission should approach burials, memorials, and commemoration in general. Among the small representative committees of units originally formed to provide insight to the IWGC, virtually all welcomed the principle and later approved of the Commission's adoption of Equality of Treatment. Similar sentiment was also presented by demobilised troops, where opinions were taken from two veterans' organizations: the Comrades of the Great War and the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers. Members from both associations urged the acceptance of this policy.¹³⁶

Related to this was whether there should be an Imperial or National memorial, or a private memorial. Though the British Parliament desired the former, there were grumblings from some parliamentarians and private citizens who wanted to be free to memorialise their lost loved ones in a personal way. Debate in this regard was relatively short as the British Government wanted a collective tribute, to denote a national sacrifice. Further, since the IWGC's mandate was to represent the whole British Empire "as one great unit to defend by arms, and if necessary to die for, the freedom of nations and the freedom of man," it was felt that an Imperial Monument was more appropriate.¹³⁷

Some of the opposition to Commission principles certainly relates to misinformation and a misunderstanding of the IWGC and its policies. A note from the IWGC explained that the spread of misinformation caused distress to the relatives of fallen

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

soldiers and brought much correspondence to the Commission. Three matters of particular concern were a belief that religious symbols were not going to be allowed on headstones, that headstones were going to be secular memorials, and that the IWGC objected to the use of Christian symbols on memorials in France to fallen soldiers. In fact, from its earliest days, the IWGC had allowed the use of religious symbols on headstones.¹³⁸

Misinformation and lack of care by higher officials had been a problem that Fabian Ware addressed during his tenure as Director of the DGR&E, just prior to the official recognition of the Commission. In a letter to then-Lieutenant-Colonel A. A. Messer, Ware outlined the need for a dedicated burial force after the burial disaster at the Somme. Ware also wanted to be apprised of every step of the discussion as he feared an outcry from soldiers on the front and civilians at home about how the bodies were being treated on the Somme front. Further, he feared that the Directorate could be used as a scapegoat for failure, and the unavoidable question of the numerous missing graves because of the Somme. Ware specifically stated that

It is obvious from their general attitude that some of our highly placed friends do not want to be bothered with this graves question at all and it might be unwise to press them too hard on the question. And while from the proof accumulated from section reports and other sources that burials were in many cases most unsatisfactorily done during the Somme push I do not think that anything else could have been expected in view of England's general unpreparedness for this war [*sic*].¹³⁹

Thus, a misunderstanding of the work and the problems facing burial and registration organizations during the war had been a problem since before the Commission was established. It continued after the IWGC started to assume Directorate duties.

¹³⁸ CWGC Archives, Box 2059, File ADD 1/1/5 (Headstones – Documents), “Specimens of Misrepresentation,” Circa 1920.

¹³⁹ CWGC Archives, Box 2033, Folder DGRE 1 – 19 (SDC 4) File DGRE 7 (Burial Companies and Corps, Formation of), “Correspondence: Fabian Ware to A. A. Messer,” 2 February 1917.

Equality of Treatment also played into the question of exhumations and repatriation. Exhumations of a body from a grave were done for sanitary reasons and for consolidation, but were mostly opposed by the Imperial War Graves Commission. These types of exhumations were acceptable to the Commission due to the needs of the French government, because, in some cases, cemeteries were placed out of need, with the intention that they would be consolidated into a larger cemetery later, and because of the problem of isolated graves.¹⁴⁰

The second type of exhumations that took place were for the sole purpose of repatriating the body back to its home country for burial. This was something that the Commission adamantly opposed as it allowed soldiers who came from wealth to get special treatment and have their bodies placed in family plots back in Britain. As such, Equality of Treatment was applied to exhumations to dissuade any special treatment.¹⁴¹ Despite this, exhumations and grave robbing for the purposes of exhumations still occurred and will be the primary focus of another chapter.

4.11 Politicians and the Debate about Burials and Repatriation

During the First World War and the subsequent years, British politicians debated burials and repatriation of soldiers, sometimes passionately. However, Canadian politicians took part in debates on these matters infrequently and typically defaulted to the decisions of their British counterparts. Moreover, during the war, the House of Commons in Canada was relatively quiet about burials and repatriation. Though there were murmurs on

¹⁴⁰ CWGC Archives, Box 2044, File SDC 51 (Exhumation and Repatriation of Remains), "Report – Imperial War Graves Commission," December 1918.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

repatriating bodies, and the undesirability of banning any bodies from being returned, these comments tended not to be presented in the House of Commons, but expressed by ministers through correspondence. However, as the Imperial War Graves Commission began establishing finalized policies and practices with cemeteries, underlying murmurs became open debate on the subject. These debates were relatively short and civilized and tended to be more attempts to gain knowledge.

Some of the primary debates in the British parliament surrounded the IWGC principles of equality of treatment and uniformity of graves. Around 21 April 1920, Colonel Sir James Remnant made a motion to allow relatives of those who fell in war to erect monuments of their choosing over the graves of their relatives. The monuments were to be subject to the regulations of the Imperial War Graves Commission. The coming debate was deemed so sensitive that the government agreed to remove the Government Whips so that the freest possible expression of opinion could take place in the House of Commons on the subject.¹⁴²

The final debate on the burial of soldiers occurred in the British Parliament on 4 May 1920. William Burdett-Coutts came out in support of the equality of treatment and uniformity of design policies set up by the Imperial War Graves Commission. However, political opposition to these two policies was fierce. A motion was put forward in Parliament to add personal details on gravestones, which had already been provided to the Commission. These included things like religious denomination, for a symbol of faith to be included on graves, and other similar information. Furthermore, there was a desire for relatives to be able to fashion an entire monument, where space allowed.

¹⁴² CWGC Archives, Box 2032, File ADD 1/1/10 (Equality of Treatment - Debate in House of Commons 1920 - 24 Apr 1920 to 4 May 1920), "Letter from Harry Gosling to Labour Members," 21 April 1920.

Burdett-Coutts explained his reluctance to deprive families of actions to alleviate the sorrow of their loss. However, he raised several pointed arguments to support the Commission in its attempts to have a uniform policy. First, he read from a letter he received from Rudyard Kipling, which noted the sorrow of Kipling and his wife over their lost son at Loos. Using Kipling's words, Burdett-Coutts dismantled the argument of those who wanted customized monuments for their loved ones who had known graves. In this case, Kipling's son's body was lost at Loos and had no known grave. Kipling believed that those whose loved one had a known grave were already better off than those who did not.¹⁴³

Next, Burdett-Coutts noted three important facets that would strengthen and unify Britain and the Empire. His first point was that the Commission had already shown a high degree of sympathy for all cases through the principle of equality of treatment and that the opposition's remarks that the Commission had not shown any sympathy were the far from the truth. Furthermore, he noted that the opposition and controversy of the debate had begun to hamper the work of the IWGC, since it had cast doubt on its fundamental principle. Next, Burdett-Coutts noted the united effort that the British Empire put forth during the war. He posited that the equality of treatment principle set forth by the IWGC also captured the unity of the British Empire.¹⁴⁴

Finally, Burdett's last argument concerned the rich and the poor. He explained that while a vast majority of relatives weighed the thoughts of special monuments over the graves of the dead, only a few were financially able to complete such a task. Moreover, special monuments would stand out amongst the rest. This would differentiate them, and

¹⁴³ CWGC Archives, Box 2032, File ADD 1/1/10 (Equality of Treatment - Debate in House of Commons 1920 - 24 Apr 1920 to 4 May 1920), "Speech by Mr. Burdett-Coutts MP, in support of the Commission's Policy of Equality of Treatment, House of Commons," 4 May 1920, 6-7.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

the sacrifice of the soldiers who rested in those graves. This, Burdett-Coutts explained, could not happen as one person's mourning was equal to another's.¹⁴⁵ Burdett-Coutts noted support from military officers in France including public and political, throughout the debate, as a continuation of his barrage of arguments to accept the equality of treatment principle and uniform design.

Burdett-Coutts' arguments had a resounding effect both in parliament and across Britain. The resolution to change the IWGC's principle of equality of treatment and uniformity was defeated, leaving the original policy intact. Some British newspapers, such as the *Daily Mail* and the *Morning Advertiser*, credited him with eloquence and power in a speech that helped ensure the success of the IWGC's principle.¹⁴⁶ Burdett-Coutts himself was humbled at the support he received across Britain, notably from the IWGC and Winston Churchill.¹⁴⁷

4.12 Debates in the Parliament of Canada

Early discussions of burials and cemeteries in the Canadian House of Commons came in March 1919 from Major-General Mewburn, the Minister of Militia and Defence. Mewburn explained his optimism that the bodies of Canadian soldiers would be preserved and cared for in perpetuity by the Imperial War Graves Commission, as they had been cared for throughout the war under the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries. Furthermore, Mewburn brought up two similar questions of bodies in Europe. There was

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹⁴⁶ CWGC Archives, Box 2032, File ADD 1/1/10 (Equality of Treatment - Debate in House of Commons 1920 - 24 Apr 1920 to 4 May 1920), "Our War Graves," May 7th and May 14th 1920.

¹⁴⁷ CWGC Archives, Box 2032, File ADD 1/1/10 (Equality of Treatment - Debate in House of Commons 1920 - 24 Apr 1920 to 4 May 1920), "Correspondence: Between Winston Churchill and W. Burdett-Coutts," 21 May 1920 and 24 May 1920.

great concern among Canadians that Canadian soldiers should not be left buried in Germany after the war. Mewburn explained that the question had been given the highest consideration, which resulted in the decision that the Canadian Corps would remove all Canadian bodies to French territory from Germany. Mewburn raised a second matter concerning people who may have felt that the bodies of their loved ones should not remain in Europe, but be brought back to Canada. To this, Mewburn described the gratitude and pride that would result from the victory in Europe. He posited that the cemeteries and graveyards abroad could centre the pride felt by Canadians, noting that these graveyards would be “the most precious monuments of all” and further remarking that “it seems a great, if sad, privilege to be represented there.”¹⁴⁸ After Mewburn’s statement, there was no discussion of soldiers’ graves, cemeteries, or honouring the dead.

There were additional debates in the Parliament of Canada. For example, a question raised in Parliament on 9 July 1924 concerned the desire of parents to bring bodies of their fallen sons back to Canada. Member of Parliament John Evans questioned the power of Canadian officials to give permission to remove bodies from their resting places for final interment in Canada. Evans detailed the case of a soldier who was buried after Passchendaele. The father had located the body and positively identified it, even after seven years. He had the body placed in a coffin and buried at Tyne Cot cemetery. However, the father did this on the understanding that arrangements were being made to have the body brought back to Canada for a final resting place.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Canada, *House of Commons Debate*, 10 March 1919 (Major-General Mewburn). http://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debates_HOC1302_01, 330-331.

¹⁴⁹ Though Evans does not list the name of the father, this was the case of H. Hopkins who was trying to bury his son, Private G. C. Hopkins, in Canada.

Upon completion of the arrangements and with legal advice, the father attempted to bring the body to Canada, but it only got as far as Antwerp when Commission officials instructed Belgian police to remove the body from the morgue and bury it. The father was in shock, having gotten legal advice in Britain that “the question of the control of the body of a soldier in France and Belgium had been taken up in the House of Commons in England and that parliament had decided that parents had control of the bodies of their sons killed overseas.”¹⁵⁰ Evans continued by noting that it was the government’s impression that all matters relating to burial and bodies rested with the IWGC. Furthermore, he noted that the Belgian Government refused any requests for repatriation unless approved by the IWGC and directed any questions relating to bodies and repatriation to Commission officials. Evans concluded by suggesting that Canada should seek authority from the Commission.

The Minister of National Defence, E.M. MacDonald, responded by stating that this particular case was quite complex and that the father himself, who was well known to Parliament, had a strong desire to see his son back in Canada. However, MacDonald explained that all administrations had agreed to a rule of no repatriation and to make changes to the rule would cost Canada a substantial sum of money. MacDonald also noted that the father and his military assistant, Lieutenant-Colonel Cawston, acted outside of the law. MacDonald’s conclusion was that remains should be left where they lay. Other MPs echoed this sentiment, adding that if the soldiers could be consulted, they would request to be left where they fell.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Canada, *House of Commons Debate*, 9 July 1924 (Mr. Evans).
http://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debates_HOC1403_05_4255-4256.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Additionally, Charles Power, the Member of Parliament for Quebec South, brought up what he called the American experiment. Power explained that the United States had attempted to bring back bodies of their war dead, but ran into significant problems and financial cost as a result. Ultimately, some of the bodies were repatriated back to the United States but not without problems, including some of the bodies remaining unclaimed. He concluded that the American experiment was a failure.

Evans responded that he hoped the case he mentioned was permanently closed. Moreover, he noted that parents of soldiers who lost their lives overseas would see the force of the arguments that had just been presented. Because of those same arguments, Evans noted that he would honour the stated rules and the entire debate was closed.¹⁵²

4.13 The Canadian War Graves Detachment (CWGD)

At the end of the war, many of the established burial organizations and registration organizations were slated for some form of reorganization. Canadian military officials opted to reorganize sections of their burial parties that were working on consolidation and re-interment of bodies. Men who were in the burial parties could be replaced by those conscripted under the Military Service Act. To complete the reorganization, Major General P. E. Thacker felt that a new organization was needed. From here, the Canadian War Graves Detachment (CWGD) was created.¹⁵³

The Detachment was a purely administrative entity. Its duties were to supervise the War Graves Detachment in France and Belgium and the verification of its records. Further,

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 942, File E-111-3 (Establishment – Canadian War Graves Detachment), “Correspondence: Major General P. E. Thacker to the Secretary – War Office – London,” 15 May 1919.

the CWGD also focused on photographing graves in France and Belgium. The intention behind this was to continue the original work of the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries until the Imperial War Graves Commission had formally taken over all duties. However, the CWGD was Canadian, only focusing on Canadian records and Canadian dead.¹⁵⁴

Despite the administrative nature of the CWGD, it also had a public relations aspect attached to it. Requests for the location of graves had increased through the war. After the war, these requests multiplied due to the search for missing bodies and the relocation of isolated graves and non-official cemeteries. The CWGD received many requests looking for graves. While it did not keep any records of Canadian soldiers buried outside of the British Isles, it did aid individuals looking for information by working with the Directorate to ensure families were given the proper information. Further, the CWGD also acted as an information bureau in the Vimy area to instruct visitors as to the best method for transportation from the centre to the cemetery they wished to visit.¹⁵⁵

By late 1920, the Detachment was given the chief work of researching the 12 000 Canadians still unaccounted for. There were two main ways of going about the work. The first was by taking research and burial slips and researching the area or map location given to identify a body. The second method was by indexing the comprehensive reports taken of cemeteries to identify the location of a Canadian body. In order to complete the first method of research, the slips of Canadians were being sorted out and removed from the rest of the Empire's slips at the headquarters of the CWGD. CWGD officials were also

¹⁵⁴ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 3433, File A-4-51 (Administration and Organization – Canadian War Graves Detachment), “Report – Organization – War Graves – Section. O.M.F.C.,” 5 December 1919.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

responsible for visiting Imperial Sub-Districts to acquire slips of Canadian bodies and determine which slips had been acted upon and how many bodies, if any, had been found in each sub-district.¹⁵⁶

By November 1920, the Canadian War Graves Detachment had taken on even more responsibilities. Though the Detachment was still completing comprehensive reports both on graves and on the missing, it also undertook the confirmation of specific burials and graves of soldiers, as requested by either Ottawa or London. In addition, the Detachment broadened its work in identification. For instance, the Detachment received a plan for the German Cemetery at Hollebeke where it was able to identify further Canadian graves. Although the Detachment was adding new tasks, it continued its role of being a liaison for visitors to the Albert and Ypres regions and provided photographs of soldiers graves in France and Belgium.¹⁵⁷

By early 1921, the work of the Detachment began to decline. This was largely due to the Imperial War Graves Commission officially taking over the portfolio of graves registration, care of graves, and commemoration. Ultimately, in March 1921, large sections of the Detachment were demobilised, though some administrative aspects of the sections remained.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 3433 File A-4-51 (Administration and Organization – Canadian War Graves Detachment), “Correspondence to Officer in Charge – Canadian War Graves Detachment – Ypres, Belgium from Captain Commanding Canadian War Graves Detachment,” 2 October 1920.

¹⁵⁷ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 3433 File A-4-51 (Administration and Organization – Canadian War Graves Detachment), “Correspondence – Headquarters – Canadian War Graves Detachment to Captain Officer I/c Canadian War Graves Detachment Albert Sector,” 12 November 1920.

¹⁵⁸ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 3433 File A-4-51 (Administration and Organization – Canadian War Graves Detachment), “Urgent Communique – Captain W. T. Cheyne to Lieut A. L. Jarche.” 22 March 1921.

4.14 Conclusion

The First World War brought a need to reform the way bodies were treated after death. In a matter of four years, a framework was established for the marking, registration, and care for soldiers' graves. Pertaining to burials themselves, the British Army entered the First World War relying on tactics and procedures from previous wars. However, the carnage proved too great. As a result, even the process of how burials were done was overhauled, as seen with the establishment of burial officers after the Somme.

Though the British Red Cross founded the process of marking and caring for graves, British military officials quickly realized that a civilian organization would never possess the necessary funding or military access to forward areas of operation. Further, lessons from failed burial registration attempts supported the need to create a military organization tasked with grave registration. As a result, the military established the Graves Registration Commission, first through the Red Cross, then within the Army structure.

The Commission was quickly reorganized into the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries upon the Army's absorption of the Commission. At this time, British politicians began to show an interest in what was to happen to graves and cemeteries at the end of the war. As a result, the Prince of Wales' Commission was established with the intention of taking over care of cemeteries in France and Belgium after the war. The Prince of Wales' Commission quickly grew in scope with the belief that it should have an Imperial character because of the collective sacrifice by Britain and its Imperial allies. As such, after the Imperial Conference in 1917, the Imperial War Graves Commission was born.

Though the organizations that dealt with burials and graves registration highlight the evolution of how a soldier's body was treated from the administrative perspective, it is important to look at how the policies and practices these organizations established were implemented at the front. The actual process of burying a body and later registering the grave proved a greater challenge to those who completed the work. Soldiers needed to deal with moral obligations of ensuring a final resting place while respecting cultural and religious needs for burials. Moreover, such burial and registration practices were not equally applied to Officers and NCOs, a likely reason for the ultimate Equality of Treatment policy that was later adopted by the Imperial War Graves Commission. The following chapter will explore the foundational ideas set up by the IWGC including the contentious issue of repatriations.

Chapter 5: Exhumation, Consolidation, and Repatriation: The Body After Death and Burial

Although most soldiers who perished in France or Britain were buried in either military or civilian cemeteries, some remains were later exhumed and reburied in a new cemetery. While the French Law of 1915 required that Canadian soldiers who died in France be buried in France in perpetuity, the law only meant that their bodies had to remain in France, not necessarily where they had originally been buried.¹ Furthermore, perpetuity did not take into consideration any form of exhumation or consolidation of graves. Finally, there was a small possibility of repatriating remains from France to Canada, both legally and illegally. Meanwhile, in Britain and non-Western front war regions, the repatriation of remains was a possibility.

For the purpose of this chapter, three terms need clear definitions: exhumation, consolidation, and repatriation. First and foremost, exhumations were cases in which soldiers' graves were dug up with a specific intention in mind; typically, it was to move the grave from a temporary cemetery or burial ground to a more permanent location. There were, however, two other scenarios in which exhumations could have occurred. The first was for the purpose of identification. While the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) forbade exhumations for identification, the Commission was only established in 1917. Prior to this, exhumations for identification occurred, but were uncommon. The other reason for exhumations was the repatriation of remains, which will be discussed later.

Alternatively, the consolidation of graves or of a cemetery was the act of exhuming either an isolated grave, a group of graves, a temporary cemetery, or a smaller permanent

¹ Widely referred to as the French Law of 1915, this refers to the French Sanitation Law that saw France place restrictions and expectations regarding British and Dominion burials during the First World War.

cemetery for the purpose of moving them to a more permanent location, typically a larger cemetery. There were two motives for consolidation: to ensure that no isolated burials would be lost or become hard to access, and to remove smaller cemeteries or graves and replace them within larger cemeteries. Consolidations came to prominence after the cessation of hostilities due to the need to incorporate smaller or remote cemeteries into larger ones, to leave a smaller footprint on the agricultural land of French farmers.

Repatriation is by far the most complex of the three terms requiring definition. Repatriation was the act of exhuming a grave and transporting the remains back to the soldier's country of origin. It could be done through legal channels, as with repatriation of Canadians who died in Britain from training accidents or disease, or through illegal channels, as with some remains smuggled from France after the war. Though formally opposed by the GRC, the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries (DGR&E), and the IWGC, repatriations occurred in *all* war zones.

This chapter explores what happened to a soldier's body after death and initial burial and focuses on the acts of exhumation, consolidation, and repatriation. Policies governing exhumations and the repatriation of remains from France to Britain and from Britain to Canada changed steadily throughout the First World War. Furthermore, while questions surrounding any form of exhumation and repatriation were present from the beginning of the war, the idea of consolidating graves became more prevalent towards the war's end.

5.1 Exhumation: Digging up the Dead

The circumstances allowing for exhumations gradually changed during the war. At the beginning, exhumations only occurred in cases where burials were determined to have had an adverse impact on the property owner's land - typically farmers' fields. Throughout the war, however, as the different burial and registration organizations began instructing soldiers on when and when not to exhume a grave, the practice of exhumation changed to better reflect the desires of military authorities. Despite the new instructions, exhumations were confusing at best due to the ever-changing wartime conditions. Further, while exhumations were covered by strict instructions about how and when they were to happen, the implementation of the instructions varied, especially after the cessation of hostilities. Circumstances for exhumations were similar to burial and registration policies – a hodgepodge of quickly implemented measures that were inadequately monitored throughout the war.²

Early documentation referencing exhumations shows a desire by the military that they not be done to identify deceased soldiers. A letter from Nevil Macready, Adjutant-General of the British Expeditionary Force, to Ian Malcolm of the British Red Cross Society dated 27 February 1915, addressed graves that Malcolm had recently exhumed:

It was brought to my notice a little while ago that certain bodies had been exhumed by, I believe, your instructions. If this was merely done in order to remove bodies from some spot where they would be inconvenient to the public or to the proprietor of the land, no exception can be taken to it. But as regards the question in general either of exhuming bodies for the purpose of identification or removal to England, the Commander-in-Chief [Field Marshal Sir John French] has issued instructions that this shall not be done, and it is never allowed in the British Area. I understand, excepting cases I have mentioned before, the French authorities are not at all in favour of

² For further information on the burial and registration policies, see chapter 3

exhumation, and if it is carried out it must be distinctly understood that it is not done with the approval of Sir John French.³

On 2 March 1915, Malcolm replied and detailed the circumstances surrounding the exhumation of soldiers:

In November, as I think you know, we did exhume some bodies in Villers Cotterets Forest: as a result we identified four officers and sixty-six men out of ninety-seven buried in one pit by the Germans on September 1st. Since then we have done nothing of this kind, being in possession of General [Joseph] Joffre's orders on the subject.⁴

General Joseph Joffre was the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army, and his order stipulated that exhumations were only to take place for hygienic reasons. It was likely circulated to troops before being officially announced in March 1915, since Malcolm was aware of it in February 1915. Despite assurances that exhumations had not been conducted following General Joffre's order, on 20 February 1915, Malcolm noted further exhumations had taken place. This case, however, was different:

On February 20th, 1915, I went to Signy Signets and found a number of graves in the fields belonging to the Maire who was carting straw at the time; he said he would be very glad to put our soldiers, now buried by the road and in the fields, into the cemetery at Signy Signets, but that this was already full and they were hoping to have another cemetery at the end of the war, wherein we should have an honoured place; in the meanwhile he promised to have a solid wooden cross placed on the graves at Fravoy, where 4 un-named soldiers lie buried by the English, who left no record of their dead companions behind them.⁵

³ Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Box 2029, Folder ADD 4/1/3 (Red Cross Record Office), File 388a (Mr Fabian Ware's Mobile Unit - 18 Nov 1914 to 5 Nov 1916), "Correspondence – General Macready to Ian Malcolm," 27 February 1915.

⁴ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, Folder ADD 4/1/3 (Red Cross Record Office), File 388a (Mr Fabian Ware's Mobile Unit - 18 Nov 1914 to 5 Nov 1916), "Correspondence – Ian Malcolm to General Macready," 2 March 1915.

⁵ Maire refers to the local mayor. CWGC Archives, Box 2029, Folder ADD 4/1/4 (Red Cross Record Office), File 388b (Graves Registration Commission - 7 Nov 1915 to 14 Nov 1919), "Correspondence – Ian Malcolm to Chairman," 6 December 1916.

Malcolm also noted that David Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer, in a letter to Lord Robert Cecil, Director of the British Red Cross, had discussed Malcolm's proposal regarding the reburial of British soldiers in France with the British Cabinet, where it was ultimately approved.⁶ From Malcolm's letters, it can be ascertained that exhumations were frowned upon at the start of the war, initially by both the French and General Joffre, and later by the British. Exhumations for identification were deemed unacceptable and prohibited by both the British and the French. Exhumations to allow for proper burials, however, seems to have been more acceptable.

The British Parliament's approval of Malcolm's proposal to rebury British soldiers also corresponded with policy issued by General Joffre. Prior to March 1915, French military officials had banned exhumations from any military zone, which included all past battlefields.⁷ Despite this, at a conference in Paris from 20 to 24 March 1915, French officials quickly realized that a complete ban on exhumations was impractical due to a fear that "hazardous materials" from the graves may contaminate water supplies. This may have been a reference to the lime used to eliminate the smell of decomposition, or the fear of disease spreading due to the decomposing bodies.⁸ As a result, it was deemed that these bodies would have to be moved.⁹

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, File MU 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "Graves Registration Commission – Notes of O.C's. visit to Paris," 20 March 1915 to 24 March 1915.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ For the same reasons, the Director of Assistance and Public Hygiene in France, along with the Minister of the Interior, created regulations that all graves of all soldiers in France were to be marked because of both hygiene and agricultural reasons.

CWGC Archives, Box 2029, Folder ADD 4/1/3 (Red Cross Record Office), File 388a (Mr Fabian Ware's Mobile Unit - 18 Nov 1914 to 5 Nov 1916), "Correspondence: Ian Malcolm to General Macready," 2 March 1915.

References to exhumations continued through March 1915. Fabian Ware, the head of the Graves Registration Committee, noted that a French bill had raised the question of whether previously buried bodies should be exhumed and cremated, or left where they were. Unfortunately, Ware's letter provided surprisingly few details on this matter and no follow-up letter regarding the meeting was attached.¹⁰

While many questions of exhumation were debated in the early years of the war, exhumation to allow repatriation was strictly forbidden throughout the entire war. In an order to the British Army, Macready introduced the idea of exhuming bodies for various reasons including repatriation, but he quickly and firmly denounced the practice. He explained that there were numerous hygienic reasons to disallow the practice, but also noted that there would be difficulties in remaining impartial, especially regarding claims of people who could exercise influence. It was for these two reasons that the practice of exhumation for repatriation was firmly rejected at the start of the war.¹¹ Furthermore, the army remained unwavering in its rejection of this practice throughout the war. From 1915 until the end of the war, very little army correspondence dealt with the subject. What has been found focused on exhumations for sanitary or consolidation reasons. As such, strict opposition to repatriations later aided in formulating the Imperial War Graves Commission's central principle of equality of treatment.

Toward the end of the war the topic of exhumations was raised again; this time, however, the sole purpose was for repatriation. By August 1918, the issues surrounding repatriation had once again entered the public realm. A report from the Franco-British

¹⁰ CWGC Archives, Box 2029, Folder GRC 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "Correspondence: Fabian Ware to the Adjutant-General," 31 March 1915.

¹¹ CWGC Archives, Box 2033, Folder DGRE 1 - 19 (SDC 4) File DGRE 12 (Exhumations, Ban on), "Army Order A.G. B/I635," 28 April 1915.

Conference, held on 7 August 1918, discussed a wide range of burial questions, including exhumations. Section C of the report specifically outlined exhumations with the intent to transfer a body back to the United Kingdom or other parts of the British Empire. The British representatives at the Conference connected the issues of transferring bodies overseas with the equality of treatment principle laid down by the Imperial War Graves Commission. The general belief among military and political officials in Britain and the Dominions was that those who could transfer a body from overseas would tend to be from the upper class. In allowing this to happen, officials believed that they would create a class distinction in remembrance, something that ran counter to the equality of treatment principle. French representatives also recognised the desirability of leaving bodies in their graves. The conference concluded, however, that “in the case of a transfer, out of France, of a body of a British soldier, the request for authorisation should be submitted through the intermediary of the Imperial War Graves Commission.”¹² As such, requests could be centralized to the IWGC, eliminating the potential for inconsistent responses if the requests were to go to various governments and government departments.

Despite the conference, it appears that the question of exhumations for repatriation went no further within the Imperial War Graves Commission until December 1918. The Commission recognised the established sentiment of leaving the bodies where they fell or were originally buried. However, it also noted the impracticality of an absolute ban on exhumations. Specifically, it noted that in certain districts, such as Ypres and the Somme, bodies were scattered over a large area, in some instances over several miles. Since First

¹² Library and Archives Canada, Department of External Affairs Fonds, RG 25 A-2 Box 322, File W18/26 Volume 2, “Report presented in the name of the Franco-British Conference which met on the 7th August 1918 at the Presidence du Conseil,” 7 August 1918.

World War battlefields were to be returned to French civilians who cultivated the land, it was determined that those bodies could not be left where they lay and that consolidation of the bodies into one area instead of many smaller cemeteries was the best course of action.¹³

The reasons behind the decision to move the bodies from their resting place to a more permanent location were simple. Since the land was to be used for cultivation within the next few years, the bodies would be disturbed. The Commission felt that any other action, or inaction, would have repercussions. First, the disruption of these bodies would be excessively painful to the families of the soldiers, since notice of the removal needed to be sent to them. Second, the IWGC felt that if the bodies were left where they lay, they stood a much higher chance of being disturbed, something that would later be seen in a negative light and would discredit the country where they lay. Though the conference notes do not reference where, large-scale consolidation practices were planned for France and references to returning land to cultivation typically referred to French farmland. Finally, the Commission noted that French farmers would be placed in an enormously disadvantageous position if the bodies were not removed since large swaths of French land would be covered with the dead.¹⁴

5.2 Post-War Exhumations

Imperial officials implemented regulations to streamline exhumations and re-burials after the war. By May 1921, the British army undertook to consolidate bodies located in former battlefields. According to army regulations, graves work was assigned

¹³ CWGC Archives, Box 2044, File SDC 51 (Exhumation and Repatriation of Remains), "Report – Meeting of the Imperial War Graves Commission – December 1918," December 1918.

¹⁴ Ibid.

depending on which nationality of graves dominated the area. Where British graves dominated a zone, the British were assigned the burial work for all bodies recovered, including French, British, Dominion, and even enemy war dead. Similar circumstances were arranged for zones dominated by French bodies. In the case of the Aisne and Marne districts, a large number of British casualties were located in the district. However, the French were assigned custodianship over the grave work because of the even larger number of French bodies found.¹⁵

Following the cessation of hostilities, the opening of graves for the purpose of either identifying or confirming the identity of remains increased dramatically. Although the British had previously agreed that identification was not a valid reason for soldiers to be exhumed, an August 1921 letter from IWGC officials referred to several hundred cases in which graves were opened to confirm the identity of soldiers and further noted that between September 1920 and February 1921, approximately 1200 graves were opened for the purpose of identification. Of these cases, approximately 400 achieved either definite or partial identification.¹⁶ It is interesting to note that the letter was sent as part of the IWGC efforts, yet the IWGC typically did not permit the disturbance of permanently buried soldiers' graves, even for identification.

The letter also made reference to the Commission's control over exhumations following the First World War. It stated that the Commission had established rigorous control over exhumations since February 1921. Further, it noted that only seventy-two

¹⁵ CWGC Archives, Box 2033, File ADD 1/3/4 FX (Taking over of DGRE by IWGC – 15 Dec 1920 to 16 Aug 1924), "Letter – 45/1/682 (F.1)," 12 May 1921.

¹⁶ Though letter appears to be signed by M, a Major-General who was also Vice-Chairman of the Imperial War Graves Commission, is very likely from Fabian Ware. Ware had been promoted to Major-General by 1921 and was the Vice-Chair of the IWGC.

CWGC Archives, Box 2033, File ADD 1/3/4 FX (Taking over of DGRE by IWGC – 15 Dec 1920 to 16 Aug 1924), "Letter 10/H/1/F." 16 August 1921.

graves were opened for the purpose of identification between February and August 1921, which was a significant decrease from the previous six months.¹⁷ In addition to identifying remains in graves, the letter also made reference to exhumations. It noted that from February until August 1921, a total 485 graves were exhumed, including those exhumed for identification purposes. Though the letter did not state the reasoning for this, it did note that permission had been given to exhume the graves for reasons of all kinds. An additional 833 applications for exhumations had been received and were being considered. This, too, is surprising as exhumations were typically only to occur to consolidate bodies, according to previous military regulations.¹⁸

5.3 Burials and Consolidation of Graves on the Western Front

Consolidation of graves was a significant issue in France and Belgium, where there was a strong push from political officials to have all allied war dead brought back from German territory and reburied. In a note likely written some time in 1920, Clause 226 of the Treaty of Versailles was detailed, which allowed for the reciprocal return of remains from enemy soil. It also noted that the French had accepted the clause and passed a law on 25 September 1920 to return the bodies of French soldiers buried in Germany.¹⁹ At this point, the note explained that the British expected the Belgians to follow the French

¹⁷ For the purposes of this study, the process of opening graves to confirm the occupants' identity is being included as 'exhumation'.

Ibid.

¹⁸ The letter notes that six hundred and forty of the graves were confined to two cemeteries. As a result, there was a strong desire to avoid moving the majority of the graves since it would so adversely impact the two cemeteries.

Ibid.

¹⁹ While the note itself does not have the year referenced, surrounding and attached documents indicate the year was 1920.

example. However, the Commission members themselves were unsure if they wanted to follow the same example and, if so, how to go about it.²⁰

Coupled with mounting requests from families to have remains brought home, the note listed three courses of action for the IWGC. The first was to leave the bodies in Germany. However, this option engendered harsh criticism because there was a growing push from relatives, as well as British and Dominion officials, to have remains brought out of Germany into France. Furthermore, French political officials had set a precedent by passing a law that allowed for French soldiers buried in Germany to be returned to France. The IWGC believed that if their officials did not follow the French example, British or Dominion citizens might point to the French law as precedence to remove bodies from Germany. As such, the note was not in favour of adopting the first option and suggested a second option to exhume and remove the bodies to France, noting that select bodies could be repatriated out of Germany. It noted that the policy could be applied in two different ways: either to all British or Imperial bodies buried in Germany, or to relatives who requested that remains be removed from Germany.²¹ Applications would be received through the IWGC or British officials, and would then be passed to the IWGC. This option was problematic not only for those who wanted their relatives' bodies to remain undisturbed, but also for the soldiers whose identities may not have been known. The third option was to return all bodies to their home countries. Like the second option, the third could either apply to all cases or could be applied when a relative made a request to IWGC officials. The third option had similar drawbacks to the second and also ran counter to the

²⁰ CWGC Archives, Box 1134, File WG 968 (Exhumations from Germany and other Enemy Countries), "25/M/317/S.1 – Exhumation from Germany," No Date.

²¹ Ibid.

IWGC policy of non-repatriation of remains to the soldiers' home countries.²² The initial reaction of the Commission was to concentrate the graves in Germany instead of bringing remains back to France. Despite this, the Commission feared reprisal from British and Dominion subjects who wanted remains transferred out of Germany and into allied territory. The fear was based on the French and Belgian decisions to bring back their war dead to their own territory.²³ Despite the concern, both British and IWGC officials ultimately decided to concentrate all IWGC remains in German territory.²⁴

Pertaining to Canadian burials in Germany, there appears to have been a proposal by Canadian officials to have Canadian war dead in German territory brought back and reburied in Belgium. Not many details were given about the proposal; however, it was noted that the proposal was postponed on 7 April 1921. Beyond this, there was no reference to the discussions that took place, or to the final decision made regarding Canadian graves in Germany.²⁵

Despite the lack of clarity in 1921 regarding what to do about all Canadian bodies buried in Germany, attempts had begun as early as 1919 to have bodies brought back to Allied territory. In July 1919, a memorandum was issued explaining that, after receiving approval, the bodies of forty-nine Canadians had been transferred from occupied territory

²² Ibid.

²³ CWGC Archives, Box 1134, File WG 968 (Exhumations from Germany and other Enemy Countries), "Letter to Colonel Branch – 20/A/2/L," 25 January 1922.

²⁴ In fact, the IWGC sometimes received complaints from relatives when the remains were being concentrated within Germany. These complaints usually involved not being informed about any pending move of the remains. The interesting aspect of these complaints was that private British citizens would pay for the upkeep of some graves in Germany.

CWGC Archives, Box 1134, File WG 968 (Exhumations from Germany and other Enemy Countries), "Exhumation in Germany – 3/A24/302/S1," 3 January 1924.

²⁵ A placeholder within file WG 968 makes reference to the proposal. However, it notes that the files were returned to the War Office on 26 February 1921. Unfortunately, these files were not located.

CWGC Archives, Box 1134, File WG 968 (Exhumations from Germany and other Enemy Countries), "45/EF/3554 War Office Files Returned to War Office," 26 February 1921.

in Germany and reburied in the Chaussée de Louvain Cemetery in Brussels.²⁶ Although the bodies were successfully transferred to Brussels, related correspondence between Canadian Corps officials highlights the confusion over the approval process, the lack of information about the transfer, and the arrangements made.²⁷

5.4 Repatriation: The Early Years

The repatriation of remains was one of the most contentious and convoluted issues throughout the First World War. Military officials opted to inter soldiers where they fell, a practise that evolved into the establishment of the Imperial War Graves Commission. However, a growing need amongst private citizens to ensure the proper burial and maintenance of a relative's grave drove some to push for the repatriation of remains to their home country.

During the early years of the First World War, repatriation efforts were carried out by British elites with deep political or social connections. These families either paid large sums of money to ensure the remains were returned to Britain, used connections with British members of parliament, or, in rare cases, wrote to King George V requesting help. Furthermore, funerals for soldiers who were repatriated in late 1914 or early 1915 were usually large, patriotic events. According to historians Luc Capdevila and Danièle Voldman, the army ended all repatriation of soldiers buried in the war zone by November

²⁶ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1 Box 3436, File D-2-51 (Removal from Germany of Canadian Bodies), "Correspondence: Staff Captain to Deputy Minister – A.G. 2b. 14-GEN-486," 5 July 1919.

²⁷ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 3436, File D-2-51 (Removal from Germany of Canadian Bodies), "Correspondence: Major L. Thornwood to Adjutant-General," 16 April 1919.

1914.²⁸ While the army may have officially ended the policy, it unofficially continued both through military and civilian means.

One of the most famous cases of a body being repatriated during the First World War was British Lieutenant William G. C. Gladstone, a grandson of former British Prime Minister William E. Gladstone who was killed in France on 13 April 1915 by sniper fire. According to historian Richard van Emden, Gladstone was buried in a British cemetery near the French town of Laventie. Despite the grave and identifying wooden cross, Lieutenant Gladstone's body was disinterred and returned to Wales for a full funeral.²⁹ Lieutenant Gladstone's repatriation was the result of some interesting and intricate circumstances. The most important was that he came from the prominent Gladstone family. His uncle, Viscount Henry Gladstone, petitioned the Prime Minister and King George to have his body brought back to Britain for burial. Underlying the family name and petition was the fact that he was fondly loved by the men of his regiment. One of the colonels attached to his unit described him as a leader of men, stating that they would have followed him anywhere.³⁰ Finally, people in Britain were deeply attracted to his family because of their name and flooded the streets to pay their respects to the lieutenant; this included men from his company in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers who were not fighting on the front.³¹ While Gladstone's prominence and death caused the men of his company and friends at home to push for his repatriation, the most significant reason for the repatriation was his family's connections.

²⁸ Luc Capdevila and Danièle Voldman, *War Dead: Western Societies and the Casualties of War*, trans. Richard Veasey (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 47.

²⁹ Richard van Emden, *The Quick and the Dead: Fallen Soldiers and Their Families in the Great War* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2011), 132.

³⁰ Viscount Henry Gladstone, *William G. C. Gladstone: A Memoir* (London: Nisbet and Co. Ltd, 1918), 123.

³¹ van Emden. *The Quick and the Dead*, 132.

As van Emden explained, Gladstone's body was the last to be repatriated officially across the channel to Britain. Further, he noted that in similar cases, the cost was met by the wealthy family of the soldier concerned. As a result, van Emden recognized the public disquiet about the rights and privileges that wealthy families had in bringing their relatives' remains back, and the British Parliament and military became concerned about a public backlash. In fact, in a letter to Cecil, Ware explained that he expected a great deal of trouble from the Gladstone case.³² While Ware did not elaborate on what he expected, later comments by Ware suggest that unless there were repercussions, more civilians would expect the repatriation of soldiers' remains. Ware even went so far as to say that it was almost unfortunate that one of the soldiers who exhumed Gladstone's body while under fire was not hit by a stray bullet.³³ As a result, the British Army overturned all repatriation efforts after Gladstone's body was brought back.³⁴

The assertion that Gladstone was the last soldier officially repatriated back to Britain during the war may not be entirely true. For example, soldiers who perished either in seaport towns or in close proximity to them were sometimes brought back to Britain earlier in the war. The allowance for soldiers' bodies to be brought back in these circumstances was only implemented on 3 December 1915.³⁵ This policy pre-dated the French Law of 1915, which nationalized burial grounds and cemeteries and was passed toward the end of December 1915. After the French law was passed, the directive to allow

³² The recipient was likely Robert Cecil, which is in line with the time period and other letters that Fabian Ware wrote to Lord Robert Cecil.

³³ Ware further notes that in 99 cases out of 100, a soldier would rather lay with their men if they were killed on the battlefield.

CWGC Archives, Box 2029, File GRC 1 (Narrative Letters and Reports), "Correspondence Fabian Ware to Cecil – GRC," 5 May 1915.

³⁴ van Emden. *The Quick and the Dead*, 133.

³⁵ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C5 Box 4401, Folder 1 File 20 (Casualties – 3rd Canadian Field Coy, CE 20-9-15 to 26-6-17), "AQ 895," 3 December 3 1915.

bodies to be evacuated from seaports to Britain was rescinded.³⁶ Though the directive does fall under the definition of repatriation, the way in which it was implemented constituted more an evacuation of casualties than an attempt to bring soldiers' remains back to Britain. The one exception here was General Routine Order (GRO) 1104 from August 1915, which briefly noted exhumations, but only in relation to the French Law of 1915. Despite the military regulations, there was no proof that any soldier's remains were actually evacuated from French seaport towns.

5.5 Digging up the Dead for Repatriation

Although exhumations were frowned upon in France, the opposite seems to have been the case in Britain. In November 1918, Mills and Sons State Undertakers sent a request to the National Funeral Company to obtain consent for the exhumation of the body of Sapper Kenneth Watson Buist, who died of accidental injuries received near Eastbourne, England, on 13 July 1918.³⁷ The request was granted. Mills and Sons also received approval from the British Home Office to allow for the exhumation and the transfer of Sapper Buist's body to Canada.³⁸ Also in November came a similar request from Mills and Sons to have the body of Private William Cecil Gardner exhumed and shipped to Canada.³⁹

³⁶ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III C3 Box 4043, Folder 1 File 55 (Burials and Cemeteries – 4th Canadian Infantry Battalion, 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade), "A.C. 831," 31 December 1915.

³⁷ Commonwealth War Graves Commission, "Casualty Details – Buist, Kenneth Watson," accessed 24 April 2017 from: <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/425797/BUIST.%20KENNETH%20WATSON>.

³⁸ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 3444 File S-2-51 (Shipment of Deceased Soldiers to Canada WGS), "Request: For the Funeral Duties of the late including exhumation and shipment of the Sapper Kenneth Watson Buist," 14 November 1918.

³⁹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 3444, File S-2-51 (Shipment of Deceased Soldiers to Canada WGS), "Request: For the Exhumation and Shipment of the late Private William Cecil Gardner," 14 November 1918.

Gardner died of pneumonia in August 1918.⁴⁰ Both men had originally been interred in Britain.

Private undertakers attempted to establish a business of repatriation. In January 1920, E. Teyseyre of Toronto announced that he was accepting commissions from relatives who desired the remains of their lost loved ones to be returned to Canada. Teyseyre noted that he would exhume, prepare, and transport the bodies of Canadian soldiers who had died and were now buried in France and Flanders. Teyseyre's Canadian representative, Robert U. Stone, was accepting commissions to remove the remains of Canadian soldiers from the British Isles.⁴¹

Despite his claims, it is highly unlikely that Teyseyre actually exhumed and repatriated any bodies from France. Not only is there no proof of this, but the Imperial War Graves Commission was quite strict. In fact, a Canadian military correspondence from 1 March 1920 noted that no authority for the transportation of bodies from France to Canada was known to exist. The correspondence requested that authorities investigate in order to determine the validity of the claim or to issue contradicting information.⁴² Stone's claim that he would remove bodies from the British Isles was plausible, as Canadian bodies were occasionally removed from the British Isles to Canada in 1918 and 1919.

5.6 Death by Disease and Accident: Repatriations Continue to Canada

⁴⁰ Commonwealth War Graves Commission, "Casualty Details – Gardner, William C.," accessed 24 April 2017 from: <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2756950/GARDNER,%20WILLIAM%20C.>

⁴¹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 3444, File S-2-51 (Shipment of Deceased Soldiers to Canada WGS) "Toronto Paper 31.1.1920." 31 January 1920.

⁴² LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 3444, File S-2-51 (Shipment of Deceased Soldiers to Canada WGS) "Correspondence – Captain – Canadian War Graves Detachment – C.G. 1-Gen," 1 March 1920.

It is difficult to find documents relating to repatriation through the end of 1915 and most of 1916. A letter dated 18 October 1916, detailed a tender from Messrs Prebblar and Spain of Folkestone for shipping bodies to Canada. Though the letter did not explicitly state that any bodies were actually transported, it did bring up the issue of disinterment of bodies, the precursor to any form of repatriation. Furthermore, the letter explained that Messrs Prebblar and Spain would charge £110 to ship a body to Canada. No further information was provided.⁴³ Although on its own, the letter does not prove that there were repatriation attempts, Canadian and British authorities began to receive requests pertaining to the repatriation of bodies after this date.

Around the same time the repatriation tender was received by Canadian military officials, military authorities in Britain began to receive requests for repatriation of remains to Canada. As a result, Canadian and British military authorities clashed over these requests since British authorities strongly opposed repatriation of remains, while Canadian authorities were open to the prospect. In one instance, a request was received by the British Admiralty at Whitehall regarding the return of the body of Lieutenant A. R. Ackerman, who died in October 1916 as a result of wounds received at the Somme in September.⁴⁴ Though the Canadian government had requested the body be returned to Canada, someone in the British Admiralty had refused to permit the departure of the transport with the body on board. As a result, an unnamed author wrote a follow-up note asking for special consideration on the matter despite the British Admiralty order that forbade transportation

⁴³ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds. RG 9 III A1, Box 84, File 10-11-2 (Transportation – Returning Bodies to Canada), “Correspondence – The Quartermaster General from W. H. Bovey – A/G 14-1-2,” No date.

⁴⁴ Commonwealth War Graves Commission, “Casualty Details – Ackerman, Arthur Ross,” accessed 24 April 2017 from: <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2756856/ACKERMAN,%20ARTHUR%20ROSS>.

of deceased officers or men on any shipments to Canada.⁴⁵ The directive also applied to shipments chartered and paid for by the Canadian government.⁴⁶ However, as a result of the Admiralty's refusal, Lieutenant Ackerman's body was lying in wait in Liverpool. The author requested special consideration for Ackerman's case, and called for an amendment to the Admiralty order forbidding bodies to be shipped to Canada to allow for cases requested by the Canadian government itself.⁴⁷

In response to Canadian authorities' requests, the British Admiralty sent a reply on 25 October 1916, explaining that:

As far as the matter of the return to Canada of the bodies of deceased soldiers is concerned, the Officer [in charge of] records, Ottawa, has cabled the Officer [in charge of] records, London requesting that certain bodies be returned. No doubt, it is the impression of the authorities in Canada that this can be done at very little expense and that such bodies can be shipped to Canada on our Government transports. As a matter of fact, the shipment of these bodies is an expensive operation and the Admiralty will not allow bodies of deceased soldiers to be returned on the transports, and to send them any other way will add to the expense very materially.⁴⁸

Though it did not specifically reference Lieutenant Ackerman's case, the letter concluded that the British Admiralty did not know how any expense of transporting bodies could be taken over by the Records Section of the Canadian military, but conceded that the department should take the matter up with authorities in Ottawa. While the letter strongly opposed returning bodies to Canada, it accepted the issue by noting that an agreement on

⁴⁵ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III A1, Box 84, File 10-11-2 (Transportation – Returning Bodies to Canada), “Correspondence – 8-1 Secretary, Admiralty – JWC/1,” 20 October 1916.

⁴⁶ Typically, the Canadian government chartered ships to return sick and wounded soldiers to Canada. These ships were sometimes used to transport bodies of Canadian soldiers as well, as was the case for Lieutenant Ackerman.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III A1, Box 84, File 10-11-2 (Transportation – Returning Bodies to Canada), “Correspondence – 6-C-746 to A/ Adjutant General Cecil Chambers, CEF,” 25 October 1916.

procedure could be established between the department and Canadian officials so that it could be adhered to in the future.⁴⁹

While the case of Lieutenant Ackerman was still being addressed by British military authorities, they received another request regarding the return of Driver Ivan James Collins' body. Collins was admitted to hospital in Bramshott on 19 October 1916. He died that night, after being diagnosed with mitral regurgitation, a form of heart disease.⁵⁰ The request asked that Driver Collins' body be returned to Sarnia, Ontario. Sent from the Deputy Assistant Adjutant General (DAAG), Lieutenant-Colonel M. H., to the Secretary at the Militia Council Headquarters in Ottawa, the letter explained that arrangements had been completed for Collins' body to be moved. However, it noted that requests for repatriation back to Canada did not fall under the scope of the Canadian Records Office, CEF. It concluded that any further requests for bodies to be shipped to Canada should be sent through the Assistant Adjutant General's Headquarters, CEF in London.⁵¹

It was at this time that higher ranking Canadian military officials were involved in the effort to have Canadian bodies brought back to Canada. Major-General J. W. Carson of the Department of Militia and Defence was the recipient of letter regarding returning bodies to Canada. The letter, from the British Admiralty and dated 31 October 1916,

⁴⁹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III A1, Box 84, File 10-11-2 (Transportation – Returning Bodies to Canada), “Correspondence – 6-C-746 to A/ Adjutant General Cecil Chambers, CEF,” 25 October 1916.

⁵⁰ LAC, RG 150 (The files of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF): Soldiers, Nurses and Chaplains), Accession 1992-93/116. Box 1878-11. “Collins, Ivan James.” Accessed 24 April 2017. <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/item/?op=pdf&app=CEF&id=B1878-S011>.

⁵¹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 1062, File D-25-4 (Deceased Soldier - Conveyance of), “Correspondence – 25-0-2077 case 261016 from Officer i/c Records, CEF to Secretary, Militia Council Headquarters,” 26 October 1916.

explained that absolutely no exception could be made to the rule that forbade the conveyance of bodies on transports under Admiralty control.⁵²

A letter relating to repatriation in general, but prompted by the Ackerman and Collins cases, was received by Colonel Sir Max Aitken on 1 November 1916. The unnamed author, a military official in Britain, explained that occasionally the government in Ottawa requested the repatriation of bodies to Canada. He noted that

until the week before last when the body of an officer which had been sent to Liverpool for the purposes was peremptorily stopped on the docks there. It was that of Lieutenant Ackerman, a man of some prominence in Canada. I vainly endeavoured to get the British Admiralty to change their decision but they stated that an absolute rule had been made which forbids the conveyance of bodies on transports under Admiralty control.⁵³

Furthermore, the author noted that he expected authorities in Canada to strenuously object to the matter, and asked that Colonel Aitken take the matter up and use his influence to orchestrate a positive outcome and have the body returned to Canada.⁵⁴ The author concluded by stating that if there were no positive outcome to the matter, he would be obliged to report the entire situation to the Minister.⁵⁵

⁵² LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III A1, Box 84, File 10-11-2 (Transportation – Returning Bodies to Canada), “Correspondence – W. Graham Greene to Major-General J. W. Carson – TA 93955/16,” 31 October 1916.

⁵³ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III A1, Box 84, File 10-11-2 (Transportation – Returning Bodies to Canada), “Correspondence – 8-1-113 to Colonel Sir Max Aitken, Bart, MP.” 1 November 1916.

⁵⁴ The language in the letter indicates that the author is in a position of power since he notes that he reports to a Minister. Though the letter does not specify which Minister, it was likely either the Minister of Militia and Defence or the Minister of External Affairs. Further, Colonel Aitken is a Member of Parliament in Britain.

LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III A1, Box 84, File 10-11-2 (Transportation – Returning Bodies to Canada), “Correspondence – JWC/1.” 31 October 1916.

⁵⁵ Political meddling was a common occurrence for Sir Max Aitken, along with Edward Carson and Sam Hughes. The issue persisted until George Perley, who attempted to eliminate any confusion and political maneuvering from what was referred to as ‘the Hughes-Carson era.’

Desmond Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics: Canada’s Overseas Ministry in the First World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 118, 168.

Lieutenant Ackerman and Driver Collins' bodies were eventually released and shipped to Canada, although the series of letters did not describe the reasons for this outcome. Lieutenant Ackerman's body was buried in the Little Lake Cemetery in Peterborough, Ontario.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, Driver Collins' body was buried in Lake View Cemetery in Sarnia.⁵⁷ The release of Ackerman and Collins' bodies to Canada was not unique since there were additional cases of soldiers being transported to Canada. For example, in November 1916, the body of Sergeant George Low, who died of heart failure at the Western General Hospital in Manchester on 22 November 1916, was transported from Britain to Canada.⁵⁸ Upon arrival in Canada, Sergeant Low was buried at Halifax (Camp Hill) Cemetery.⁵⁹

The Low and Collins examples reveal that not all soldiers who died in Britain were buried there, according to military policy. Some soldiers who died of disease, such as Low and Collins, were allowed to be transported back to Canada for burial. As Lieutenant Ackerman had died of wounds received on the Somme, rather than disease, military officials were staunchly opposed to bringing his body back to Canada.⁶⁰

Following the shipment of Sergeant Low's body to Canada, the bill for transfer was paid by Colonel R. S. Low, presumably a relative of Sergeant Low. However, Colonel Low

⁵⁶ Commonwealth War Graves Commission, "Ackerman, Arthur Ross," accessed October 9, 2016, <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2756856/ACKERMAN,%20ARTHUR%20ROSS>.

⁵⁷ Commonwealth War Graves Commission, "Collins, Ivan James," accessed October 9, 2016, <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2756073/COLLINS,%20IVAN%20JAMES>.

⁵⁸ LAC, RG 150 (The files of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF): Soldiers, Nurses and Chaplains), Accession 1992-93/166, Box 5763, File 25: Low, George (500421). <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=540524>.

⁵⁹ Commonwealth War Graves Commission, "Low, George," accessed October 29, 2016, <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2755092/LOW,%20GEORGE>.

⁶⁰ Commonwealth War Graves Commission, "Ackerman, Arthur Ross," accessed October 9, 2016, <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2756856/ACKERMAN,%20ARTHUR%20ROSS>.

complained about excessive charges for the shipment of Sergeant Low's body. W.J. Pirie, of the Paymaster General's Branch (PMG), explained that the return of caskets to Canada was not a common occurrence. As such, he suggested that all arrangements for such events should be assigned to one officer who could then become familiar with the procedure of shipping bodies. This would ensure that delays and inconvenience would be eliminated in the future.⁶¹

Pirie provided information on some of the first steps in having a body shipped to Canada. He noted that a request would come from Canada with a notification that a payment had been received by the Receiver General of Canada. Next, the bills were to be paid by the Receiver General and forwarded to the Paymaster General's Office. Pirie finally noted that in no case should a bill be forwarded to relatives of soldiers.⁶² Pirie's letter was an interesting contrast to official military policy regarding repatriation. Along with the request for tender letter to return bodies, these examples show that a concerted effort by Canadian civilians to bring the bodies of their relatives back to Canada was supported by Canadian military authorities. Such efforts were contrary to British military opinion and practice at the time, as well as the opinion of the Prince of Wales' Committee.

While Collins and Ackerman's bodies were being transported from Britain to Canada in October 1916, the situation in France was different. A stop was put on the transportation of any fallen soldier being shipped from France to England. Dated 27 October 1916, a letter on behalf of the British Director of Personal Services simply stated that in reference to an undisclosed letter from 22 October 1916, it was impossible under

⁶¹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 3328, File R-27-43 (Return of Deceased Persons and Effects), "Correspondence: W. J. Pirie – H.Q. 649-L-4456," 24 July 1917.

⁶² Ibid.

current circumstances for the body of any soldier to be brought to England.⁶³ The letter does not list what the circumstances were or what may have recently changed since it is evident from the 27 October correspondence that a prevalent perception was that bodies could not be repatriated. Next, it stated that the rejection of repatriation was related to existing circumstances. Yet, as was evident with other attempts to stop repatriation, circumstances surrounding the practice of repatriating bodies continually changed during the First World War. As such, this letter cannot be taken as evidence that repatriations actually ceased in or around October 1916.

5.7 From Britain to Canada: Repatriations in 1917

Even though the British Admiralty explicitly stated that no more bodies were to be transported from Britain to Canada, isolated cases continued to crop up through 1917. In February 1917, the relatives of deceased soldiers requested that their bodies be returned to Canada at their own expense. Canadian officials noted that there were no contracts in place, leaving the set price up to individual funeral contractors, which resulted in families complaining of being overcharged by the shippers. As such, the letter suggested that the Chief Purchasing Officer – Canadian Overseas Military Forces approach the Funeral Contractor – London Area and the shipping companies themselves to help establish terms for future arrangements.⁶⁴ While the Canadian military was not formally getting involved

⁶³ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence, RG 9 III B1, Box 1062, File D-25-4 (Deceased Soldier - Conveyance of), "Correspondence – to Mrs. Olson from the War Office," 27 October 1916.

⁶⁴ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence, RG 9 III B1, Box 3444, File S-2-51 (Shipment of Deceased Soldiers to Canada WGS), "Correspondence – BM 26217 – Shipment of Bodies of deceased soldiers to Canada," 26 February 1917.

in shipping bodies back to Canada, it was aiding Canadian citizens in securing a reasonable charge and potentially avoiding future complaints about overcharging.

In April 1917, Captain G. S. Hossley, Assistant Purchasing Officer, detailed the conveyance of bodies of dead Canadian soldiers to Canada. According to Captain Hossley, the Canadian military was negotiating contracts for the return of Canadian bodies in all regions where Canadian personnel were quartered. He also noted that the estimated cost of shipping a body back to Canada was £75. Hossley provided an itemized breakdown of the costs associated with shipping the body, including shipping and packing bodies for the voyage. The £75 charge was for the basic requirements of shipment and did not cover any extravagances. In addition to the basic requirements were special items, such as ornately furnished caskets, which required an additional £10, and exhumations, if necessary, would require an additional £15. Finally, Hossley noted that due to unexpected circumstances that could arise during shipment, a £500 deposit by the requestor was required to be sent to the Minister of Militia in Canada before any shipments could commence. Cremation was also investigated as a viable option for bringing bodies back to Canada. Hossley noted that the costs for cremation would likely only reach £50 and that in all probability, the costs could be as low as £35.⁶⁵ Stipulations also applied to shipments. For instance, soldiers who died from an infectious disease would not be permitted to be transported to Canada. Also, the

⁶⁵ While does not stipulate who is paying for bodies to be returned to Canada, it does hint that the families themselves are paying for shipping costs and the military is only getting involved due to the complaints of overcharging.

LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 3444, File S-5-51 (Shipment of Bodies of Deceased Soldiers WGS), "Correspondence – to Headquarters – Canadian Troops – London Area from Captain G. S. Hossley – Conveyance of bodies of dead Canadian soldiers to Canada – 2-10-4," 13 April 1917.

personal attendant who was to accompany the body throughout the voyage would be required to purchase a ticket as carriage charges did not cover the cost for the attendant.⁶⁶

The information presented in this correspondence does not match up with the previously established notion that repatriations would not be allowed. Although the British Army asserted that repatriations would not be allowed after the repatriation of Lieutenant Gladstone, Canadian attempts to repatriate were successful. And while the British Admiralty also attempted to disallow repatriating bodies back to Canada, information was still being disseminated to strongly support the idea that Canadian bodies were still brought back to Canada.

Communications continued to circulate throughout the Canadian military hierarchy regarding the shipment of bodies. On 26 March 1917, a Major with the Canadian Troops in the London Area sent a letter to Headquarters, London District, regarding the shipment of bodies to Canada. He explained that relatives sporadically requested that bodies be shipped to Canada. According to the major's records, no information was on file about any regulation governing or prohibiting the practice of shipping bodies to Canada, and he requested advice and instructions on the issue.⁶⁷ The reply to the 26 March letter, sent by Major F. J. Carruthers, stated that there were no regulations governing the shipment of bodies of deceased Canadian soldiers to Canada. Major Carruthers noted that at this time, it was not desirable that bodies should be shipped at the public's expense.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 3444, File S-5-51 (Shipment of Bodies of Deceased Soldiers WGS), "Correspondence – FO 26317– Shipment of Bodies of deceased Canadian soldiers," 26 March 1917.

⁶⁸ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 3444, File S-5-51 (Shipment of Bodies of Deceased Soldiers WGS), "Correspondence – Overseas/3868 – from Major F. J. Carruthers," 13 April 1917.

It is interesting to note that the British Admiralty had already forbidden attempts to ship bodies from Britain to Canada in or around October – November 1916. Remarkably, these orders did not seem to have been distributed around Britain, despite the problems and controversy that surrounded the shipment of Lieutenant Ackerman's body. Though unlikely, one possible explanation is that the British Admiralty only restricted the practice on active troop transports that were already carrying wounded or on-leave soldiers to Canada. However, the general wording from the letter indicated that bodies were not to be shipped to Canada at all. As such, the more likely situation was that there was a communications breakdown between British officials and Canadian officials in Britain. This too does not answer the residual questions about who ordered the British Admiralty to eliminate shipment of bodies to Canada and why the order was never distributed throughout Britain.

Repatriation of Canadian remains back to Canada continued into September 1917. Several more instances of soldiers shipped to Canada occurred in August and September 1917. One example was Lieutenant E. G. Hanlan, who was killed in an airplane accident in Sedgeford, England, on 9 August 1917.⁶⁹ Starting on 16 August 1917, a flurry of correspondence pertaining to the shipment of Hanlan's body was distributed the Canadian military authorities in London. The first, dated 16 August 1917, was concerned with the standard procedure of handling effects, noting that the effects of Lieutenant Hanlan should be returned to the officer in charge of the Estates Branch for transmission to the next of kin

⁶⁹ Official burial records stated that Hanlan was a Lieutenant. However, archival documents list him as a Captain.

LAC, RG 150 (The files of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF): Soldiers, Nurses and Chaplains), Box 26-8, "Ackerman, Arthur Ross (7586)," <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.item/?op=pdf&app=CEF&id=B4013-S026>.

in Canada. The letter concluded that it was the intention of the relatives to have the body returned to Canada, rather than simply Hanlan's personal effects.⁷⁰ A letter from 17 August 1917 noted that the required cablegram from Canada authorising the return of Hanlan's body to Canada had been received.⁷¹ Finally, Lieutenant Hanlan's body had been forwarded to Canada on the *S. S. Grampian*, which had sailed from Liverpool on 31 August. The ship arrived in Montreal on 11 September.⁷²

The example of Lieutenant Hanlan's body being shipped to Canada helps to prove some important information regarding repatriation to Canada. First, the return of bodies to Canada was clearly accepted by both the Government of Canada and Canadian military authorities. This theory is also supported by the volume of correspondence regarding tenders for shipping bodies back to Canada. However, it appears that, excluding the case of Lieutenant Ackerman, all other soldiers died of sickness or accident while in Britain.

The British Admiralty was unwaveringly opposed to Lieutenant Ackerman's body being brought back to Canada. This opposition was likely a result of the problems facing British political and military officials following the repatriation of Lieutenant Gladstone. Furthermore, the opposition can also be linked to early work completed by the Prince of Wales' Committee, which had existed since January 1916. Toward the end of 1916, the committee was already producing some initial policies on burials and repatriation which were in the early stages of development, and had not yet been made public. However, the

⁷⁰ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 3328, File R-27-43 (Return of Deceased Persons and Effects), "Correspondence: Lieutenant D. Richards to The Quartermaster-General." 16 August 1917.

⁷¹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 3328, File R-27-43 (Return of Deceased Persons and Effects), "Correspondence: From Captain JMG – Deputy Assistant Quartermaster-General – QMG 1-6-4," 17 August 1917.

⁷² LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 3328, File R-27-43 (Return of Deceased Persons and Effects), "Correspondence: Attention A.G. 2D from Captain S. M. Bosworth – Director of Supplies and Transport," 20 September 1917.

questions remain: why British and Canadian military authorities never explicitly stated the difference in repatriating bodies from Britain and repatriating bodies from France and why British military authorities generalized their opposition to repatriation when it was clearly permitted throughout 1916 and 1917.

5.8 Grappling with Questions of Repatriation: The Canadian Government in 1918

The issue of whether or not to allow repatriation had come to an impasse by 1918. By April 1918, British officials had written to their Canadian counterparts about shipping bodies to Canada. They informed the Canadians that the British Home Office was still receiving requests for the bodies of Canadians to be exhumed and shipped to Canada. A large portion of these requests were being received through an undertaker from Toronto by the name of Miles. Since many of the requests were similar, the Home Office feared that a trade was beginning to form in the shipment of bodies to Canada. While shipping bodies from Britain to Canada was allowed, British officials preferred as few shipments as possible and felt that if undertakers were actively disseminating the information and their services, there could be a significant increase in the amount of requests. They also felt that there would be fewer requests if this ‘trade’ did not exist.⁷³

Officials from the Home Office felt they needed to implement new rules to govern the return of bodies to Canada. Throughout March and April 1918, British officials prepared memoranda and other circular messages outlining their decision that no bodies were to be shipped out of the country. However, the Admiralty felt the option was not

⁷³ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III A1, Box 84, File 10-11-2 (Transportation – Returning Bodies to Canada), “Correspondence: Shipment of Bodies to Canada. A.G. 14-Gen-480,” 6 April 1918.

enforceable, especially since Canadian officials were open to the idea of repatriation of Canadian bodies. As a result, the Home Office passed on two options, which were also echoed by the Canadian Adjutant-General (A.G). The first was that the transportation of bodies from Britain to Canada should be completely halted. However, along with Home Office officials, the Adjutant-General (A.G.) noted that such a policy might not be practicable, which led to a proposition by both sides. This second approach was that a series of procedures could be implemented to keep the 'trade' of returning bodies to Canada at a minimum. First, all communications regarding the return of a body to Canada had to go through Militia Headquarters in Ottawa. Next, the Home Office was to be instructed to refuse all requests for shipment of bodies to Canada unless Militia Headquarters had approved them. Finally, an Army Council Instruction was to be issued to all Imperial hospitals notifying them that no bodies were to be shipped without Militia Headquarters' approval.⁷⁴ This added an extra layer of bureaucracy to the situation.⁷⁵ Furthermore, British authorities felt that with a regulated system, only legitimate claims would be made with the contingencies in place, which would reduce the number of requests for repatriation.

The British drafted an Army Council Instruction to be issued to all Imperial hospitals, to inform them that no Canadian body was to be shipped to Canada without authority from the Home Office. This requirement was to ensure that bodies were not shipped to Canada before the British military authorities were made aware of the death, or before the burial was completed.⁷⁶ In response, a letter written by Walter Gow, Deputy Minister of the Department of Militia and Defence, addressed the current and future status

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

of repatriations. Gow described the situation as delicate, and said that the Minister, Sydney Mewburn, felt that that no clear action could be taken on the matter. Gow noted that Canada could not object if the British Home Office opted to forbid the export of bodies during the war, since it was the British prerogative.⁷⁷

Gow also stated that Mewburn felt there was merit in the suggestion that public notice be given to Canadians explaining that future requests for the return of bodies to Canada needed to be submitted through the proper channels, in this case, Militia Headquarters in Ottawa. The logic behind the suggestion was that it would enable the Canadian government to keep an eye on undertakers attempting to take advantage of the situation, a suspicion posited by the British Home Office. Despite the merit of this suggestion, Gow concluded that the situation was quite tricky and that a better approach might be to leave it alone because it was such a sensitive topic.⁷⁸ He also noted that the situation only applied to bodies in Britain, as France had made it practically impossible to exhume and export the body of any soldier back to its native country with the French Sanitation Laws of 1915.

The response to Gow's letter was received in June 1918 from Eugène Fiset, the Deputy Minister of Overseas Military Forces of Canada. He weighed in on the issue of repatriating bodies to Canada and the proposals put forward by the A.G. in April 1918, and agreed that it was not advisable to advertise the possibility of returning bodies to Canada. As such, he also thought it was unwise to publish any order as to the procedure to be

⁷⁷ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 3444, File S-2-51 (Shipment of Deceased Soldiers to Canada WGS), "Correspondence: Walter Gow – Deputy Minister," 6 April 1918.

⁷⁸ Despite the concern around the sensitivity of the issue, Walter Gow expressed concern that any undertaker in Canada might be taking advantage of the War for profiteering. Ibid.

followed to return a body to Canada. Finally, he posited that it should be possible to arrange with the British War Office to have requests for the return of bodies go through the Minister of Militia and Defence. Moreover, Fiset noted that refusal could be automatically given if the request was not properly transmitted through Militia Headquarters in Ottawa.⁷⁹

The same day that Gow sent his letter addressing repatriation of remains to Canada, a circular message from the Canadian A.G. highlighted that there had been an increase in the number of requests received by Britain to have Canadian remains exhumed from their British graves and transported to Canada. It also noted that the requests were quite similar for each case, strengthening British Home Office officials' belief in a 'trade' in transporting bodies. Furthermore, undertakers in both Canada and Britain were canvassing relatives of the dead to have them put requests in to the Home Office to have bodies exhumed and returned to Canada. As a result, a sense of urgency to deal with what was referred to as an 'illicit trade' was forming in both Canada and Britain. Adding to the urgency was the circular message, which noted that the National Funeral Company of London had shipped fourteen bodies to Canada, but that only five of the bodies had been members of the Overseas Military Force of Canada (OMFC). The other bodies were Canadians who were transferred as non-commissioned officers (NCO) to the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) to take out British commissions in the RFC. Despite the urgency, Canadian officials were not concerned with the shipment of their bodies.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 3444, File S-2-51 (Shipment of Deceased Soldiers to Canada WGS), "Correspondence: Deputy Minister of Overseas Military Forces of Canada to Militia and Defence," 18 June 1918.

⁸⁰ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 3444, File S-2-51 (Shipment of Deceased Soldiers to Canada WGS), "Correspondence: Shipment of Bodies to Canada. A.G. 14-Gen-480," 6 April 1918.

While internal Canadian debates were ongoing, a memorandum entitled *Transportation of Bodies of Dead Canadians* was prepared on 27 April 1918, referring to positions held in the British military and British War Office. The memorandum was a policy analysis of the previous regulations dictating the transportation of bodies within Britain and to Canada. The standing order for transporting bodies in relation to approval of dispersing funds for the transportation was as follows: “In cases in which the death of a soldier in the United Kingdom can be held to be attributed to active service, and the relatives specially desire the funeral to take place at the man’s home, the cost of conveyance of the body may be defrayed from public funds. This arrangement does not at present apply in the cases of officers...”⁸¹ The memorandum clarified that according to a British War Office letter dated 7 March 1917, it was not intended that “the interpretation of the words attributed to active service should mean that terms were confined to soldiers dying as a result of service on the Continent, but that they should be interpreted to apply in the case of a soldier dying during the period of the present war, whether from natural causes or not, while serving in the United Kingdom.”⁸²

Further, the memorandum noted that the Accountant General in September 1917 explained that the practice in the past had been to pay the cost of transportation between the place of death in the United Kingdom and the port of embarkation, typically Liverpool. Such practices were applied to the bodies of soldiers that were shipped to Canada and those that were shipped to different locations throughout the United Kingdom.⁸³ As a result of

⁸¹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 1229, File D-5-5 (Death Reports – Procedures), “Memorandum: Transportation of Bodies of Dead Canadians,” 27 April 1918.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

the policy review, the memorandum recommended that the practice of paying for the transportation costs of soldiers within Britain and to Canada should continue.

From both the memorandum and the discussions between Fiset, Gow, and Mewburn, it is clear that despite both British desire and stated British policy on the transportation of bodies to Canada, Canadian authorities were reluctant to forbid the transportation of bodies from the United Kingdom to Canada. This reluctance continued throughout 1918. This was especially evident at a meeting of the Overseas Military Council of Canada that convened on 20 August 1918. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the shipment of bodies to Canada. Though the meeting record contains no minutes, it does report that the council considered the establishment of a policy governing the shipment of bodies to Canada as undesirable and recommended that no formal action should be taken in relation to the subject.⁸⁴ Therefore, the status quo remained.

By December 1918, the conversation in Canada had shifted from whether or not to return bodies to Canada, to which companies to use in order to accomplish this very task. Prior to April 1918, the Department of Militia and Defence had used Messrs Vigers and Sons to transport bodies from the United Kingdom to Canada. The company had charged \$600 per body when it was shipped to Toronto. However, the department became aware of similar work being completed by the National Funeral Company for \$400. The department opted to use the services of the National Funeral Company.⁸⁵ However, the quality of the National Funeral Company's services was called into question in December 1918 when

⁸⁴ ⁸⁴ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III A1, Box 84, File 10-11-2 (Transportation – Returning Bodies to Canada), “Meeting of the Overseas Military of Canada – Reference MIN.10-11-2,” 20 August 1918.

⁸⁵ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 3444, File S-2-51 (Shipment of Bodies of deceased soldiers to Canada WGS), “Shipment of Bodies to Canada – A.G. 2b. 14-GEN-480,” 5 December 1918.

one of the bodies arrived in a terribly decomposed condition. Its condition was so poor that the Department of Militia and Defence questioned whether the body had been embalmed before being shipped from Britain. Though the National Funeral Company explained that the body was expected to be in poor condition as the cause of death had been pneumonia and the body had been in the ground for a month, the department opted to re-evaluate its preferred vendor for shipping the bodies. As a result, Militia and Defence contacted the previous company, Messrs Vigers and Sons, which agreed to continue shipment at the rate of \$400.⁸⁶

Even Commission officials turned a quasi-blind eye to repatriation of Canadian bodies from Britain. In December 1918, the same year that Canadian officials were finalizing their repatriation of remains policy, the War Graves Commission drafted a report dealing with repatriations that explicitly referenced the inability to allow for repatriation of remains. The report itself stated that “to allow removal of a few individuals (of necessity only those who could afford the cost) would be contrary to the principle of equality of treatment.”⁸⁷ However, it should be noted that the Commission report only made specific reference to burials in France, Belgium, Italy, and Greece, and did not include bodies repatriated to Britain. This, in itself, opposed the equality of treatment principle – in that soldiers perishing in Britain could be repatriated, unlike their kin on the continent – especially when public funds could be used to return bodies to Canada.

⁸⁶ The document was signed A. G. and addressed to the C.G.S. These likely refer to the Adjutant-General, who was Major-General P. E. Thacker and the Chief of the General Staff, who was Lieutenant-General Sir R. E. W. Turner.

Ibid.

⁸⁷ ⁸⁷ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III A1, Box 84, File 10-11-2 (Transportation – Returning Bodies to Canada), “Report – Imperial War Graves Commission – Winchester House,” December 1918.

The better explanation as to why bodies could be shipped from Britain, and not from the continent, lies more with the foreign agreements that allowed for burials on the continent. The French Law of 1915 and subsequent laws in Belgium, Italy, and Greece strictly forbade future repatriation of remains. As a result, the Imperial War Graves Commission opted to honour the promises of non-repatriation to limit bureaucratic problems in completing its work, while ignoring the application of its policies in areas where there would be no resistance, namely the British Isles. In fact, correspondence suggests there was little of desire to instigate a complete ban on repatriation of remains from Britain to Canada, something that Imperial War Graves Commission officials would have been aware of due to the strong connections between the War Office, the Home Office, and the IWGC itself.⁸⁸ As a result, by ignoring the issue of repatriations from Britain, the IWGC was able to divest itself of bureaucratic infighting between British and Canadian officials, and the families of those who had perished during the war.

5.9 Theft of Remains: Grave Robbing and the Case of Anna Durie

The order forbidding the repatriation of remains from France to Canada was not universally accepted. Multiple attempts were made to retrieve the remains of lost loved ones in France. One such case involved H. Hopkins, who petitioned the IWGC in 1919 to allow his son's remains (Private G. C. Hopkins) to be repatriated to Canada. Upon refusal by the IWGC, the elder Hopkins proceeded to steal his son's body from his grave.

⁸⁸ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III A1, Box 84, File 10-11-2 (Transportation – Returning Bodies to Canada), “Memorandum for Major Gibson,” 23 August 1918.

Unfortunately for Hopkins, the IWGC traced the remains to a Belgian mortuary and reinterred Private Hopkins' body in its original grave.⁸⁹

Though many instances of grave-robbing were prevented through surveillance of cemeteries, or investigation afterwards, not all cases were stopped. One lesser known example of a stolen body was that of Major Charles Sutcliffe, who was killed behind enemy lines and buried in a private vault. His family's request for repatriation was denied. However, in August 1925, his father, F.W. Sutcliffe, was able to retrieve the body from the vault and bring it back to Canada.⁹⁰ Though the French Préfet of the town allowed this, Sutcliffe had convinced the Préfet that the body was actually that of an American in order to get permission. Since the United States did allow for repatriation, the French Préfet authorized the removal of Major Sutcliffe's body to New York. However, after its arrival in New York, the body was shipped to Lindsay, Ontario.⁹¹

The Anna Durie case was similar to the Sutcliffe case in that they both involved parents who requested repatriation of their sons' bodies and in each case the bodies were eventually buried in Canada. However, unlike the rather straightforward Sutcliffe case, the example of Anna Durie was far more complicated. In the early hours of a July night in 1925, Anna Durie proceeded to British Loos Cemetery with two helpers and her daughter and removed Captain William Arthur Durie from his final resting place. The case was a result of a mixture of upper-class privilege, the military's failure to enforce burial policy during the war, and the IWGC's failure to enforce their own policies after the war. First,

⁸⁹ Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), 62.

⁹⁰ CWGC Archives, C.C.M 19578 – Capt. W. A. Durie (Digitized), "Note for the Vice-Chairman HPRF/MB," 10 September 1925.

⁹¹ Veronica Cusack, *The Invisible Soldier: Captain W.A.P. Durie, His Life and Afterlife* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2004), 180.

Anna Durie repeatedly defied military doctrine when it came to her son. For example, when Captain Durie was injured in May 1916, Anna Durie proceeded to the front of France, a serious violation of military rules during the war. While there, Mrs. Durie supplied her son with fresh fruit, strawberries, and flowers as he healed from a gunshot wound through his lung.⁹² Though Durie survived being wounded in 1916, he was killed in action on 29 December 1917 at Lens. His body was buried in Corkscrew Cemetery near Lens in France.

In August 1919, Durie made a request to the Directorate of Graves Registration and Enquiries (DGR&E) about the possibility of purchasing a zinc coffin at her own expense and having her son's remains placed in the coffin.⁹³ The request for a coffin was later rejected by IWGC staff. Durie had also made several trips to France to view her son's grave. She wanted to remove Captain Durie's body from the blanket it had been buried in and place it into a coffin "so that he would not lie in the cold earth."⁹⁴

Durie then received upsetting news about her son's grave in September 1919. An official notice advised her that Corkscrew would eventually be concentrated into the British Cemetery at Loos. Despite the notice, no action was immediately taken.⁹⁵ However, Durie worked to ensure that her son would be brought back to her family resting place at St. James Cemetery in Toronto. Durie noted meeting Captain Chanter at Corkscrew Cemetery in France in late 1919. According to Durie, Chanter had been contracted by families to place flowers at the graves of their loved ones in Corkscrew Cemetery. He was linked to the IWGC, though Durie was vague as to how. In discussions with Chanter, he "let it slip

⁹² Ibid., 34.

⁹³ CWGC Archives, C.C.M 19578 – Capt. W. A. Durie (Digitized), "Correspondence: DGR&E – France – Lt. Col. G.H.," 19 August 1919.

⁹⁴ Cusack, *The Invisible Soldier*, 150.

⁹⁵ CWGC Archives, C.C.M 19578 – Capt. W. A. Durie (Digitized), "Correspondence: CCM/38/19578 to Anna Durie," 10 September 1919.

that many other families had similar problems and suggested some had even exhumed the bodies of loved ones and returned them home.”⁹⁶ It is likely here that the idea of stealing Captain Durie’s body became a primary objective for Anna Durie.

Durie first approached elected officials in Canada, but although they were sympathetic to her cause, they were unable to help. On 3 February 1920, Durie wrote a letter to the Headquarters of the Canadian War Graves Detachment (CWGD) in France detailing changes in the French Government’s embargo that prohibited the removal of bodies. She noted, and included, the Toronto newspaper advertisements by Robert Stone that explained bodies could be returned from certain districts in France. Evidently, Durie claimed that Mr. Stone had approached her about returning the body of her son. The letter requested that the body be exhumed and prepared to be moved; arrangements were made to transport the body by rail and ship at the expense of Mrs. Durie.⁹⁷

The article caused a flurry within the CWGC. A letter from the CWGC to the War Graves Section explained that no known authority for the transportation of bodies from France to Canada existed. It also expressed concern that the Toronto advertisement could result in further enquiries from Canadians to have bodies returned from France to Canada. As a result, it was requested that an investigation should take place and, if necessary, that contradictory information should be published to prevent such requests from reaching the

⁹⁶ Cusack, *The Invisible Soldier*, 154.

⁹⁷ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 3444, File S-2-51 (Shipment of Bodies of deceased soldiers to Canada WGS), “Correspondence: Re the removal to Canada of the body of Captain W.A.P Durie 58th Cdn Bn CEF from Corkscrew British Cemetery,” 3 February 1920.

CWGC offices in France.⁹⁸ However, according to the IWGC, there was no alternative to the exhumation policy.⁹⁹

After attempts to sway politicians in Canada failed, Anna Durie resolved to steal the body of her son. On 1 August 1921, a report was received by Major W.S. Brown, the Area Superintendent, stating that Captain Durie's grave had been disturbed. Major Brown had previously interviewed Durie and described her as one of the "most unreasonable and one of the most difficult women I have ever had to deal with while engaged on this work."¹⁰⁰ Major Brown reported that Anna Durie's intention after the failed attempt was unknown. However, on the night of her first attempt, the horse was spooked, which caused the cart springs to snap, and the coffin of Captain Durie was placed back into the grave and the mound made up.¹⁰¹

After this unsuccessful attempt, there was a significant lull in internal IWGC correspondence surrounding Durie. However, by July 1924, she had reappeared in France. Although the IWGC arranged for additional surveillance of Corkscrew Cemetery, Durie did not attempt another theft.¹⁰² In January 1925, IWGC officials could no longer wait to move bodies from Corkscrew Cemetery to British Loos Cemetery. Anna Durie was quickly informed. Durie then sent two letters to the IWGC in which she outlined her significant knowledge of the re-location, requested to bring her son's body back to Canada, and entered "emphatic protest" unless the Commission would grant her request. Colonel

⁹⁸ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 3444, File S-2-51 (Shipment of Bodies of deceased soldiers to Canada WGS), "Correspondence: No. C. G. 1-Gen," 1 March 1920.

⁹⁹ LAC, Department of Militia and Defence Fonds, RG 9 III B1, Box 3444, File S-2-51 (Shipment of Bodies of deceased soldiers to Canada WGS), "Correspondence: 15/C/15/S to Captain V.C. Snider – War Graves Section, Overseas Detachment," 19 March 1920.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² CWGC Archives, C.C.M 19578 – Capt. W. A. Durie (Digitized), "Correspondence: 28/G24/19/21 to Major A.L. Ingpen," 31 July 1924.

Goodland was taken by surprise by the amount of knowledge she had regarding IWGC workings. On 21 January 1925, he wrote that:

[u]ndoubtedly this lady must have an agent in this country who is watching our movements. Who this can be I cannot imagine. No publicity whatever has been given to the projected removal of Corkscrew Cemetery, which fact must, of course, be known to more or less of the personnel of our Registration Department, and of course, it is quite possible that Mrs. Durie's agent is in close touch with one of our people from this Department, but I have no means of confirming this.¹⁰³

In response, the Commission reminded Mrs. Durie that it had no control over Corkscrew Cemetery's re-location.

Upon learning of the finalised removal of her son's body from Corkscrew to Loos, Anna Durie launched a quasi-public relations campaign against the Commission. A newspaper article appeared in the *Evening Telegram* in Toronto noting the IWGC violation of their pledge to leave cemeteries as they were. Furthermore, the article noted Canadian officials' objections to such moves.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, some politicians did object to the removal of Corkscrew Cemetery. T.L. Church, MP for Toronto, noted the violation of the agreement to leave cemeteries with a certain number of bodies where they were. However, the response he received from the Honourable Mr. Macdonald in the House was that the Government of Canada was not aware of any such agreement. He also noted that it was generally understood that cemeteries with fewer than forty bodies needed to be consolidated.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ CWGC Archives, C.C.M 19578 – Capt. W. A. Durie (Digitized), "Correspondence: C.R.4254/R/DC (23/A25/2/S1) from Colonel Goodland," 21 January 1925.

¹⁰⁴ The *Evening Telegram* notes that 215 Canadian bodies were to be moved, however, Corkscrew Cemetery only had 215 bodies, 36 of which were Canadian. CWGC Archives, C.C.M 19578 – Capt. W. A. Durie (Digitized), "Newspaper: "Bodies of 215 Canadian Soldiers May Be Moved by French Government," 7 February 1925.

¹⁰⁵ CWGC Archives, C.C.M 19578 – Capt. W. A. Durie (Digitized), "Questions in House – Removal of War Graves," 23 February 1925.

Despite the slight uproar caused by Durie, the bodies from Corkscrew Cemetery were removed on 20 February 1925 and transported to British Loos Cemetery. Upon receiving notice of the move, Anna Durie wrote to Sir Fabian Ware in a tizzy, referring to the IWGC as “the most tyrannical and autocratic body of men that has existed since England lost the North American Colonies.”¹⁰⁶ Within two weeks, Anna Durie was on her way back to France.¹⁰⁷

Sometime between Anna Durie’s landing in France and 26 July 1925, she met again with Captain Chanter, who arranged for the body of Captain Durie to be exhumed from British Loos Cemetery and transported back to Canada. However, according to Durie, he tightened his rules in order to avoid detection, insisting that they could not use a coffin when transporting the body, as the coffin was the reason the 1921 attempt had failed.¹⁰⁸

In the early hours of the morning on 26 July 1925, Anna Durie, with the aid of two men, exhumed the body of Captain Arthur Durie. Durie’s journal described the ordeal in great detail. As the two men she hired to steal the body commenced their work, she was overcome by her decision to desecrate her son’s grave. She noted begging the men to stop; that Captain Durie’s body was not being treated with dignity. Pieces of Captain Durie were scooped out of the coffin and into a valise to be transported back to Canada.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ CWGC Archives, C.C.M 19578 – Capt. W. A. Durie (Digitized), “Correspondence: 16/G25/1/V Anna Durie to Fabian Ware,” 2 March 1925.

¹⁰⁷ Before Captain Durie’s body was exhumed and transferred to British Loos Cemetery, the IWGC worked with the French Government to have his body left as an isolated burial in France. Here, Anna Durie would have been required to care for the graves out of her own funds. Unsurprisingly, the French Government rejected this overture from the IWGC stated that the body needed to be moved.

CWGC Archives, C.C.M 19578 – Capt. W. A. Durie (Digitized), “Correspondence: 23/C25/1/V Lt-Colonel Osborne to Fabian Ware,” 11 March 1925.

¹⁰⁸ Cusack, *The Invisible Soldier*, 181-182.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 185-187.

Anna Durie's reaction to the desecration of Captain Arthur Durie's grave was reminiscent of her stated reasons for returning Captain Durie's body to Canada. Anna Durie sought a Christian final resting place for her son. However, in order to provide that final resting place, she was forced to desecrate her own son's grave. Her actions demonstrate the extreme measures that people would use to secure a final resting place for their loved one's body.

Commission staff did not immediately realize that Captain Durie's body had been stolen. Initially, the British Loos Cemetery gardener noticed that the grave had been disturbed. As a result, a test with an iron rod occurred on 28 July 1925. However, it determined that the coffin was still in the grave. It was not until Commission officials requested that the grave be opened to be inspected that they learned the body had been removed.¹¹⁰ By this time, Anna Durie was already on her way back to Canada. Initially, the French authorities wanted to prosecute Anna Durie's agents and to take Anna Durie into custody for questioning.¹¹¹ However, proceedings were delayed since France had to deal first with Britain and then with Canada to move forward with any case against Mrs. Durie. Ultimately, by September 1926, the IWGC officials were of the firm opinion to drop the matter altogether, a sentiment that was shared by Canadian officials. In March 1928, IWGC officials formally wrote to the French authorities to dissuade them from further pressing the Durie issue.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ CWGC Archives, C.C.M 19578 – Capt. W. A. Durie (Digitized), “Correspondence: FR/1000/1005 – Captain W.A.P Durie,” 13 October 1925.

¹¹¹ CWGC Archives, C.C.M 19578 – Capt. W. A. Durie (Digitized), “Correspondence: 9/D26/27/L – from IWGC Land and Legal Adviser,” 9 April 1926.

¹¹² CWGC Archives, C.C.M 19578 – Capt. W. A. Durie (Digitized), “Correspondence: 6/C.28/302/L – Fabian Ware to Major Ingpen,” 6 March 1928.

After March 1928, the case disappeared from IWGC records. Other than a formal request to strike Captain Durie's name off the British Loos Cemetery registry, officials made no mention of the incident. After Captain Durie's public funeral, Anna Durie claimed she had secured the right to have her son's body returned from the IWGC.¹¹³ Examples such as the Durie case were rare and extreme. However, they demonstrate multiple issues that the IWGC needed to contend with. There was not only the public's need for a Christian burial for their loved ones, but also the legitimate fear of later desecration by unknown parties, both of which were exemplified by the Durie case. Though the Commission aimed to provide the best security possible for graves, its own officials recognized the chance of grave robbing and body ransoming, which had been as recently as forty years prior to the First World War.¹¹⁴

The three examples above demonstrate important aspects of the IWGC. The first was the degree to which the IWGC was willing to defend its policies, as seen in the case of Hopkins. Despite steadfast attempts to honour these ideals, individual citizens continually attempted to bypass them, as seen with the Durie case. The second aspect was the degree to which the ideals established under the IWGC were opposed by some in the general public, shown clearly through the above examples. Despite this, the decisions made by the Commission were unopposed by the large majority of the populace.

Finally, it becomes clear that with the founding of the Imperial War Graves Commission, aspects of burial policies, namely the non-repatriation policy, were unwavering, unlike the earlier years of the war when examples of repatriation were

¹¹³ Cusack, *The Invisible Soldier*, 193-194.

¹¹⁴ CWGC Archives, C.C.M 19578 – Capt. W. A. Durie (Digitized), "Extracts from letter from the Vice Chairman to Col. Osborne Reference 21/D26/302/V," 21 April 1926.

frequent. The one exception to this was in Durie's case, when the Commission decided not to press charges against her. However, this decision was made more out of a fear of negative publicity than a desire to go against the Commission's own regulations.

5.10 Conclusion

Exhumation and repatriation of remains became controversial issues during the First World War and the post-war clean-up. During the war, bodies were routinely exhumed from temporary gathering areas and brought to more permanent cemeteries. While these types of exhumations were authorized by military authorities, the progression of the war saw requests being made to exhume bodies for the purposes of identification and repatriation. It was these latter requests, particularly those involving repatriation, which made exhumations contentious. Military authorities preferred exhumations for sanitary reasons only, and frowned upon all other requests.

While exhumations could and did happen, French political and military authorities eliminated any prospect of repatriating remains with the implementation of the French Sanitary Law of 1915 and subsequent nationalization of bodies buried in France. Even with the formation of the Imperial War Graves Commission, this law was respected and further integrated with the IWGC's equality of treatment principle as part of its argument against the repatriation of remains. Although a large majority of the populace accepted the IWGC and French officials' ruling, it was not a universal acceptance. There were cases of families requesting repatriation of remains from France, the common arguments being that French and American bodies were repatriated to their hometowns, or that the family desired a guaranteed final resting place. Despite several requests, the IWGC was unrelenting in its

desire to keep all bodies buried in British cemeteries in France, which resulted in families repatriating remains without Commission knowledge or authority. The most infamous case of grave theft was Anna Durie's theft of her son, Captain William Arthur Durie.

Rules governing burials were strict in France due to the authority of the French government; however, they were not as strict in Britain. Exhumations for the purpose of transportation were common throughout Britain. In some cases, exhumations were granted when it was known that the bodies would be brought back to Canada. Although British officials disapproved of repatriating bodies from Britain to Canada and even attempted to stop the process, there was less appetite among Canadian officials to discourage these attempts.

Burial policy during the First World War allowed for different practices and procedures, depending on if a burial was in Britain or France. The largest difference can be seen when comparing burials in France and burials in Britain. Between the two, there were two sets of rules governing burial policy. Repatriations were allowed in Britain while forbidden in France. The transportation of bodies after death frequently occurred in Britain. However, French officials attempted to ensure bodies were only moved in extreme and unfortunate circumstances, essentially when they felt there was no other option.

The main reason for the divergence in burial policy can be attributed to the fact that burials were occurring in two different countries under two different governments. As such, although a British soldier was responsible to the British Army and later the Imperial War Graves Commission, both had to honour French laws during and after the war. This was because the land that the British Army, and later the Commission, used to bury bodies was granted to them in perpetuity, but under conditions. Another factor behind differences in

policy was that burials in Britain took place under different circumstances. Burials in France were done in haste to ensure a soldier was honoured after death; burials in Britain were typically due to either sickness or accident. As such, burials in Britain occurred under completely different circumstances than in France, which led to disorganization in aspects of burial policy, namely repatriation of remains from Britain to Canada.

Conclusion

A poem by Norman MacDonald, entitled *Thoughts off the Battlefield*, references his experiences as a soldier. Phrases like “listening to the screams of dying, Stumbling o’er the corpses dead,” “slush and blood damned Fritzes, Just like maggots everywhere,” and “arms and legs and battered faces, Bodies caught in wire traps” appear throughout the poem.¹ The effects of war, death, and burial profoundly impacted soldiers throughout the war; they held a desire to honour those who had fallen by providing a decent or honourable burial. This type of burial gave closure to those fighting on the war front, but also provided a physical location for relatives back in Canada to visit after the war ended.

While progress was made in ensuring a proper burial for soldiers throughout the war, there were still many policy failings. Some of these failures can be attributed to the heavy fighting that was a result of warfare. Other failures were a result of unpreparedness for the type of war being fought and for ongoing changes in the cultural views towards death and burial. Earlier conflicts, such as the Crimean War (1854-56) and the Boer War (1899-1902), demonstrated that soldiers cared about the treatment of their comrades, yet the policies that were instituted during these conflicts amounted to little.

Current literature has not captured the entire story of death and burials during the war, and instead has focused on burials that occurred long after death – primarily in Imperial War Graves Commission cemeteries. Such an approach is understandable as there has been great interest among scholars in the creation of cemeteries, and little interest in the immediate need to bury a body after death. Furthermore, the dominant academic interest has been commemoration of sacrifice after the fact, rather than the practical need

¹ Vancouver Island University, The Canadian Letters & Images Project, “Norman Ewart Poem,” n.d., accessed November 26, 2017 from: <http://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-10134>.

to bury a body upon death. What was missing in this approach was the human side of burials – the great lengths to which soldiers went to ensure a body received a proper burial.

Despite its importance in the twentieth century, burial policy, along with consideration for how a body was treated after death, was not always considered by military officials during conflicts. Evidence from nineteenth-century conflicts shows that little care was given to soldiers' bodies after death. In fact, soldiers' bodies were treated as a valuable resource that could be exploited. Just as no-man's-land in the First World War was full of bodies with equipment that could be pilfered and reused, nineteenth-century soldiers and civilians took body parts to repurpose them for the living, as seen with the discussions of cadaver bones and medical experiments on dead bodies.

In the preceding years and conflicts, British soldiers started to consider how a fallen comrade was buried. At the very least, these soldiers were talking and writing about the subject more than in previous years. However, the underlying disconnect between British civilians and British soldiers fighting in conflicts meant that if a soldier perished, there was little civilian concern for their body. What remained was concern among British soldiers themselves.

Although beliefs began to change following the Crimean War, efforts to commemorate the soldiers ultimately fell short of becoming a developed burial policy. While soldiers who fought in the conflicts continued to display concern for their fallen comrades, working to create memorials and cemeteries to honour their sacrifice, the feelings were not adequately addressed in the British Parliament. The problem that persisted was the lack of connection between British soldiers and British civilians, something that began to change toward the end of the nineteenth century.

The Second Boer War (1899-1902) in many ways acted as the catalyst for changes to culture and death in Britain and Canada. The British military was reformed in the 1870s to promote localized connections to civilian populations, thus raising the profile of soldiers. As such, there was arguably a growth in concern over what happened to a soldier's body after death and a desire to see soldiers receive a proper burial – a desire already being displayed by the British military. Further, since soldiers were now recruited from similar geographic areas, the likelihood that soldiers among a unit knew one another outside of the war was significantly increased.

The establishment of a graves registration organization during the Boer War can be viewed as a significant success for the period. While there had been individual attempts to bury bodies previously, such as during the Crimean War, there was no significant undertaking after the war to ensure that graves were cared for in perpetuity. Although politicians did explore the idea after the Crimean War, the fact that this commemoration amounted to very little points to the lack of cultural support for the idea at the time. Despite the successful establishment of a formal organization and grave registration practices, the initiative to register burials and graves was abortive.

Despite the failures that arose from burial and grave registration efforts by the Guild of Loyal Women, the initiative opened national discussions about burial and war. By the turn of the twentieth century, civilians began to show greater consideration for past war cemeteries and memorials. Both Canadian and British civilians began to ask questions about old war cemeteries. Funding was sought to put the graves in order, and to ensure they were honoured in the years to come. The importance of this rethinking should not be underestimated in the discussion of the treatment of war dead. While asking questions

about graves from ten, twenty, and thirty years before, requests were also received pertaining to gravesites and abandoned cemeteries that were a century old and long forgotten. In some situations, there was little or nothing left of the cemeteries, in which case officials explored the idea of erecting memorials to those who were sacrificed, but whose graves had been lost to time. It was the optimism from the Boer War that created a new fervour for marking and honouring old military gravesites and cemeteries. However, the importance of the Cardwell military reforms and the coincidental timing with changes to British ideas on burial and death cannot be discounted.

Recruitment in Canada at the start of the First World War was localized, meaning there was a much higher chance that soldiers knew one another and each other's families. As a result, the common bond among soldiers was stronger than in the nineteenth century. Mixed with the rise of the citizen army and localization, thoughts on the treatment of a soldiers' body significantly changed. As such, the First World War was ready for a new approach to burying bodies on the front.

Yet, significant issues arose after the start of the war. There were several reasons for this. First, there was a general perception that the war would be over by Christmas 1914, which meant a lack of readiness to deal with the number of deaths to come. Another reason was that during the Boer War, grave registration had been left to civilian organizations. As such, there was no central organization responsible for marking and registering graves. Because of the unpreparedness of military officials, burials reverted to former army practices. However, these older ideals and approaches, such as the use of mass graves, did not take into consideration the changes that had occurred in the British and Canadian armies, nor did they reflect the change in culture that had occurred among civilians

regarding military burials. Though subtle, civilian ideas about burials changed, resulting in a need for a Christian burial. These ideals were also infused into the military, and reinforced the need to reform burial practices during a conflict where officials were simply not capable of dealing with the number of burials that would be required. Furthermore, this requirement to modernize burial practices was trivial; the priority was to win the First World War.

Despite the military's attempts to reform the way burials were conducted and marked, problems with burials continued, typically due to situational circumstances. Heavy fighting in certain areas meant that larger numbers of bodies needed to be buried. For example, after the Somme Offensive, bodies remained unburied for up to three months. In cases such as this, mass burials were still used due to the urgent need to bury the bodies, although this practice had been officially abolished. The need to alleviate morale issues on the front, while also systematically solving sanitation issues, caused military officials to start rethinking the way soldiers were buried, especially the use of mass graves. Thus, despite early reforms, older burial techniques were still employed, which ran counter to the new need for Christian burials. Although mass graves did not provide a single grave for a family to honour or commemorate after death, they fulfilled the practical need to bury a soldier on the battlefield, while alleviating some of the decline in morale among troops on the front.

With the formation of the IWGC, the issue of soldiers' burials returned to civilian control. The Commission instituted a series of principles relating to how soldiers should be buried, all of which fell under the umbrella of the central theme that all soldiers should receive equal treatment, regardless of class, wealth, or rank. Although noble, the 'equality

of treatment' principle, as it became known, was fiercely debated among politicians and civilians back on the home front. The most contentious of these debates typically included the prospect of repatriating soldiers back to their home countries for burial in family plots. While repatriations of remains were rare during the war itself, high-profile examples still existed. British and Canadian civilians saw the United States repatriating its soldiers as further evidence that repatriations were possible. While the repatriation question was eventually put to rest in both the British and Canadian Houses of Commons, private individuals took the situation into their own hands to steal the remains of soldiers to return them to their home countries.

Cultural changes among the civilian population and the subsequent lack of military readiness for such changes led to the burial issues that befell soldiers' burials during the First World War. While unprepared for the type of warfare that occurred during the First World War, the British and Canadian militaries were equally unready to deal with burials during modern warfare. Yet the common soldier's bond prevailed – soldiers felt a duty to ensuring fallen comrades received a proper burial. Despite great risks, some soldiers sought to ensure a comrade received an honourable, proper, or Christian burial. The reasons behind this were threefold: soldiers did it to provide closure for themselves, but also out of a sense of duty; soldiers did it for the fallen, to ensure that their body and their sacrifice was honoured; and soldiers did it for the fallen's family, so that they could have a place to visit and commemorate their fallen loved one. It was the actions of these soldiers, especially in dangerous situations, that spearheaded a re-consideration of the way soldiers were buried on the war front.

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